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How The Emancipation and The Enlightenment Changed Jewish History

A Symposium

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JUDAISM

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

On February 13, 1818, John Adams wrote the following words in a letter to Hezekiah Niles: "The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the hearts and minds of the people. The radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments and affections of the people was the real American Revolution." These words were equally true of the French Revolution, whose two-hundredth anniversary took place this year. The eighteenth century *philosophes*, the influence of thinkers like Voltaire, Diderot and Montesquieu, among others, led to the physical manifestations of the Revolution in 1789. *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* may have been the battle-cry of that revolution, but even more significant was the great intellectual consequence, the belief in the supremacy of Reason.

Political emancipation was one goal of the Revolution; intellectual enlightenment was another. The political revolution changed not only developments in France but, coming hard on the heels of the American Revolution, it engendered and promoted ideas that, in the 19th century, changed the map of Europe.

Enlightenment's main message was, to quote one of our authors, "the duty to respond positively to a modern, secular culture that is based on rational, universal, humanistic values." The combined result of both the Emancipation and the Enlightenment was the breakdown of the ghetto and a great variety of other developments in Jewish life—intellectually, religiously, socially and demographically.

Since the French Revolution is often regarded as the beginning of modern history, even though the late Professor Alexander Marx, who taught Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary, maintained that whatever happened after 1770 was merely current events, we felt that an evaluation of its impact would be in place during this anniversary year. Obviously, historical processes unfold slowly, and the Jewish people have a very long history, so that two hundred years are but a fraction of time. The Chinese, too, have a long history and that is what may have led Chou En-Lai to say, when he was asked what were the effects of the French Revolution, "It's too early to say." Nonetheless,

cautious stock-taking is always a value, especially in the light of the many profound changes that have taken place in Jewish life in the past two centuries.

With that conviction, we invited a group of distinguished thinkers to contribute to a symposium on "The Effects of the Enlightenment and Emancipation on Jewish Life." A number of papers, each from a different perspective, view the great changes in religion in the 19th and 20th centuries. One paper deals with Moses Mendelssohn, who was a seminal figure of the early days of the Enlightenment, and whose own life experiences were a paradigm for the emancipation process. Another deals with Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim, the first to underpin Biblical cosmogony with scientific ideas. Two seriously consider the demographic consequences and come to some very sobering conclusions. One discusses Zionism as a product of political emancipation, while two take up the developments in Hebrew and Yiddish literature. In all, a fairly broad spectrum of analyses to which we are devoting a complete and somewhat larger-than-usual issue.

R.B.W.

The Impact of Enlightenment on Religion

ELIEZER SCHWEID

THE AIMS OF THOSE WHO FIRST strove to bring "Enlightenment" to the Jewish communities of central and eastern Europe were, basically, socio-cultural, socio-economical and socio-political. Their intent was to change the image of Jewish society and of the Jewish personality, through education and socialization, for the sake of "Emancipation." Jewish society and the Jew as a person were to be adapted to their surrounding higher culture, so that they might be accepted and integrated economically, socially and politically. Obviously, such changes would have a direct impact on religion, at least on the level of its educational institutions, its communal leadership and its established social norms and, therefore, the development of an attack, a bitter and vehement one, against the Halakhically-established religion seemed to be unavoidable right from the beginning. One should, however, stress the fact that this was not the intention of the first originators, and that they did their utmost to avoid it.

The "Founding Fathers" of *Haskalah* were religious persons in the traditional sense of the term, faithful to the Torah and observers of its commandments according to the accepted Rabbinic interpretation. Demanding knowledge and practice of *Torat Ha-Adam* ("The Law of Humanity"), they did not intend to replace or even to devaluate *Torat Elohim* ("The Law of God"). It was, for them, a necessary addition, even from the point of view of Halakhah. Indeed, most of them naively believed that, in their demand to adhere more carefully to the ethical commandments, to develop aesthetic awareness, and to get a broad "general education" comprising languages, natural sciences and the humanities, all of which were both culturally elevating and helpful in the entrance into respectful professions, they were only reconstituting an original ideal of the Torah itself.

Indeed, *Haskalah* was not the first movement to preach a positive attitude towards a surrounding gentile culture and to attempt to create a living synthesis between the holy old and the enriching new. The *Maskilim* could cite the opinions of first rate authorities of Jewish law and wisdom, especially from the Sephardic "Golden Age," the most important of whom was Maimonides. They could justify their claim of a le-

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gitimate continuity; they were renewing the days of old in the spirit of their own time, and doing so in the most favorable conditions for a reconciliation. They could maintain this view because most of the contradictions or tensions which appeared between the authority of the revealed religious sources and the rational authority of the sciences, those that had provoked the thunderous polemics in the Middle Ages, seemed now almost to have vanished. The new sciences and some of the new philosophies seemed, indeed, to be much more acceptable from the point of view of traditional wisdom. There were, of course, some difficulties to be straightened out between the simple meaning of some Biblical verses and the sciences, but this could now be done in a far easier and less artificial form of interpretation than in the past. It seemed, therefore, that the optimism of the first *Maskilim*, believing that they would be able to fulfill their cultural ideals as a renaissance of the Jewish sources, and not as a revolution, was not utterly groundless.

Yet, the developing dynamics of the relations between the *Maskilim*, who were anxious to promote their ideals as fast as possible, and the old-fashioned Rabbinic leadership that fanatically resisted any change, either in education or in communal organization, motivated the growth of a radical brand of *Haskalah*. It turned directly against religion (as it has been shaped in the ghettos of central and east Europe), using the most venomous polemical tools that had been forged by the French and German enlightenment against despotic Christian clergy and Church scholasticism. One should be aware that, even then, the comprehensive attack on religion was the banner of a radical minority in *Haskalah*, while the majority mitigated their criticism of certain aspects of Jewish religious education and customs with a positive relation to Jewish faith and tradition. Yet, for the Orthodox leadership, the radical heretic minority became the embodiment of Enlightenment as such, because, in their view, every innovation or deviation from accepted norms was considered a total threat against the fundamental belief in *Torah Min Hashamayim*.

There were, in fact, two main inter-related factors which motivated and informed the dynamics of enmity between the Enlightenment and religious Rabbinic Leadership: 1. the ambiguous, halting relation of the European gentile governments and gentile societies to the practical implementation of Emancipation; 2. the initial unambiguous rejection of Enlightenment (and Emancipation) by the majority in the Jewish religious community, especially in eastern Europe. Practically speaking, what was being demanded from the Jews as a precondition for a full political and social Emancipation was nothing short of full assimilation; it meant giving up almost any unique expression of separate Jewish personal and communal existence. A realisation of the extent of the demanded changes motivated those who were anxious to achieve Emancipation, by any and all means, to propose "amendments" which much exceeded

the original scheme of classical *Haskalah*. Obviously, they much exceeded the inherent capacity of traditional Halakhah to adapt itself to changing realities according to its own principles. Moreover, the demands of humanistic scholarship, if accepted as a cultural ideal and internalized as such, could hardly be achieved without corrupting, or at least greatly compromising, the traditional standards of Talmudic scholarship. This meant that the two ideals of life and learning, the secular-humanistic and the religious, though not necessarily denying each other's validity, became rivals, each claiming exclusivity. They presented to the young generation two alternatives for a total way of life.

The forerunners of Orthodoxy, who were more sensitive to these dimensions of modernity than were the first originators of *Haskalah*, were quite justified in their suspicions and, from their point of view, they could not react differently. Yet, their abrupt and relentless reaction only served as an affirmation of the sharpest *Maskilic* criticism against "Rabbinism."

Haskalah became bitter and heretical in its polemic, a measure which, of course, did not fail to justify a further extremism on the part of the Orthodox. Thus, a cycle of ever-growing polarized inner differentiation in Jewish society was begun, and it was this cycle that created the kaleidoscopic panorama of views which crystallized into the main spiritual movements of Judaism in the 19th century. One may point to the Enlightenment at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries as the main spiritual initiating factor of all of these movements, either as a positive source of inspiration, or as a negative challenge, or, in most cases, as a variety of combinations of both. But, let us add that the polarized oscillation in the prospects of Emancipation and in the feelings of gentile society towards the Jews, that is, the ups and downs in the achievement of "rights" versus the activity of anti-Semitic movements, decisively influenced the orientation either towards assimilation, or towards a return to, and reaffirmation of, a Jewish religious uniqueness. Therefore, every "progressive" ideological position, though always dogmatically stated, was open to unceasing modulations of turns, crises and returns.

The impact of the Enlightenment on Jewish religion was first revealed by the negative reaction of the traditional Rabbinic leadership. Resistance to Enlightenment and to Emancipation was regarded as a proof of faithful stability. This stance, which was later to be defined as "Orthodox," was an a-prioristic objection to every innovation in the traditional way of life. Every conscious deviation from the ancient rules was considered heretical. Yet, ironically, this very stance, once stated programatically as the religious ideology of a certain group within the Jewish people, was, in itself, an innovation, and it implied many organisational, ideological and behavioral changes. The total refusal to accept modernity became internalized as a new, unifying consciousness

of a group, and was projected outward as a new style of behavioral protest.

In fact, Orthodoxy developed as a game of imitations through contradictions: every amendment or change proposed by the "Enlightened" was actively denied by protests to the contrary, reaffirming the old as a uniform and as a guarded wall: in clothing, in manners and customs, in language, in the style of the prayer in the synagogues, etc. Thus, the Enlightenment influenced Orthodoxy in the same way that the pre-Orthodox society had influenced it, namely, by serving as its "negative." But, on a closer examination, one may detect a developing modus of a positive inspiration. In a sense, what was defined ideologically in a later, reflexive, phase as Orthodoxy, was an unadmitted selective adaptation of the originating stance of Enlightenment itself, namely, the definition of Judaism exclusively within the borders of "pure *Halakhah*." We refer here to the ideology of Enlightenment as it had been formulated by Mendelssohn and Weisel. Being themselves Halakhah-abiding Jews, they safeguarded their Jewish belonging and testified to the Jewish legitimacy of their attitude towards modernity by an acceptance of a rather fundamentalistic formulation of the concept of *Torah Min Hashamayim*. To accept lovingly the burden of the commandments, the essence of being a Jew, was, even for them, first and foremost, a commitment to the study of Torah and to the keeping of its commandments. This meant that the Jew was allowed to study and practice all that was contained in the humanistic cultural ideal only insofar as it added to traditional education, and, certainly, not instead of any essential part of it. The great problem raised by such claims, of course, is how one defines, practically, what may serve as "a full measure" of Jewish education and what may serve as a "completion," or as an "addition," to the study of Torah. Therein lies the rift between Enlightenment and Orthodoxy. Still, it seems to be a most significant historical fact that Orthodox ideology, which faced not only the heretical challenge of Enlightenment and Reform, but, also, the fast-changing reality which enforced a certain modicum of adaptation on even the most obstinate defiers of Enlightenment, accepted as an unavoidable and, therefore, as a legitimate concession to reality, what it had obstinately rejected in the first stage, when it had been formulated by others as an ideal. But let us reiterate: what was accepted was the fundamentalistic theological framework, together with its Halakhic consequences, and not only the compulsory acceptance of a minimal amount of secular education.

Considered as a modern type of heresy, the Enlightenment created, as an imitated challenge, a modern type of radical Orthodoxy. But what could it produce directly out of its inner positive philosophical core? Obviously, it gave birth also to a variety of atheistic and completely assimilationist world views, and one should remember that such

world views could operate as socio-cultural trends either within the Jewish fold, or even sufficiently recognizable as Jewish, outside of it. Thus, it could serve, from time to time, as a reservoir for movements of return and revival. But, from our point of view, the most important direct religious result of Enlightenment was a modern type of Jewish religiosity. The “ideal” manifestation of this new religiosity (ideal both in its radicalism and in the essence of its adopted philosophy—German Kantian and Post-Kantian idealistic philosophy)—was the Reform movement, alias Liberal Judaism. From the opposite Orthodox point of view, this type of “pseudo-religion” was, of course, the worst embodiment of heresies resulting from Enlightenment. Indeed, it was far more repugnant and intolerable than plain atheism or complete assimilationism, or even conversion to Christianity because, comprising in itself all of these three stratagems for escaping Judaism for the sake of Emancipation, it was sufficiently impudent to propose itself as the true continuation and as the ideal elevation of “Historical” Judaism. That was, indeed, the self-understanding of Liberal Judaism’s Founding Fathers. From their own point of view they rejected Orthodoxy as a reactionary falsification of true, historical (mainly Biblical) Judaism. For them, Enlightenment was nothing short of prophetic revelation (philosophically interpreted as an inner intellectual illumination) which renewed the original ancient “Ethical Monotheism” and re-established it on the level of progressive modernity.

From a distant, historical perspective one may justify these two descriptions of Liberal Judaism as symmetrically valid, though one-sided and quite simplistic, the full truth being their dialectical synthesis. The demand to reform or to “amend” Jewish Law, and to reformulate dogmatic Jewish creed, may rightly be described as a step further and beyond the original Enlightenment, once one realizes that gentile authorities and gentile society would never be satisfied by a partial reorientation. For the sake of Emancipation, Judaism should give up any singular quality that separates it as a strange national entity from the socio-cultural and national gentile environment, so that no one will be justified in condemning it as “a state within a state.” This meant, indeed: 1. an unreserved social and cultural assimilation; 2. the replacement of the transcendent and super-rational religious authority of *Torah Min Hashamayim* by the autonomous humanistic authority of Reason, identified as God, because only in this way might one legitimate the far-reaching reforms in Halakhah according to what human beings consider as historically necessary; 3. a far-reaching approximation of Judaism to Christianity, especially to Protestantism. This was to be achieved, firstly, by an acknowledgement of Christianity’s universal mission as a tool for the spreading of monotheistic truth to all humanity (From this point of view, Christianity was considered as a legitimate offspring of Judaism and, therefore, also a candidate for unification

with Judaism in an approaching messianic future, when Christianity would be purified of all its idolatrous remnants); and, secondly, by an imitation of Christianity, defining Judaism as a dogmatic and a confessional religion, and adopting the aesthetical and experiential forms of the Christian ritual.

On the other hand, one might correctly describe Liberal Judaism as a consequential development of the positive rationalistic and humanistic Jewish philosophy of Enlightenment. Using the terms of Weisel's ideology of Enlightenment, one may analyse Jewish Liberal religiosity as a reduction of "The Law of God" to "the Law of Humanity," or, rather, as the elevation of the "Law of Humanity" to the status of the "Law of God." Indeed, a modern philosophical interpretation of almost all of its main spiritual contents has been developed: God as the ideal unity of truth and the good; the relation between man and God as man's absolute commitment to achieve true knowledge through science and philosophy, and to do good through the fulfillment of universal ethical commandments, accepted as "categorical imperatives;" love of God as the feeling of the sublime, prayer as the aesthetical, namely, poetical and musical expression of this feeling; the election of Israel as the commitment of this people to its universal mission to spread the knowledge of ethical monotheism throughout humanity, and messianism as the striving to redeem Israel through the implementation of its universal mission, Emancipation being understood as one dimension of a general historical process towards the fulfillment by all humanity of the Jewish monotheistic ideals. As such, Liberal Judaism was also a serious creative effort to renew Jewish religiosity from its very sources: rediscovering its universal values and renewing its historical knowledge both scientifically and philosophically. Indeed, the impressive development of the Science of Judaism and of Jewish philosophy in the 19th century and the main force behind the revival of Biblical studies and Biblical interpretation in modern Judaism was mainly the achievement of Liberal and other modern Jewish scholars and philosophers. Thus, Liberal Judaism's claim of establishing a new type of Jewish religiosity had acquired a certain substantial justification.

The clash between the powerful authority of traditional Jewish education, represented by Orthodoxy, and the powerful attraction of humanistic modernity, represented by Liberal Judaism, produced three more intermediate types of modern Jewish religiosity, all of them aiming at an ideal synthesis but ending with an established pragmatic compromise. The Conservative movement tried to achieve its synthesis on the level of historical tradition by cutting the edges of one-sided extremity on both sides: Torah-Judaism is not as unchangeable and unflexible as Orthodoxy would have it, and modernism is not, in itself, as ideal as Liberal Judaism would announce it to be. Once you recognize the necessity of traditional continuity, even for culture, and not only

for religion, once you arrive at a firm conviction that not every innovation is necessarily an improvement, and that Emancipation, though a good, is not worth every price, and that adaption to, and absorption of, humanistic modernity should be evaluated according to inner Jewish standards and balanced by the commitment to the continuity of historical tradition, then, all of the positive components of both the holy religious sources and humanistic culture might fall together into a balanced combination, out of which a new synthesis could emerge. This is, of course, the ongoing task of modern Rabbinic scholarship. Yet, it seems that even the founders of the "Positive Historical School" had to admit that, using their Halakhic and scholarly methods, and having to reconcile a tradition and a culture which aims at its own totality, they were able, through a series of pragmatic compromises, to achieve only a certain blend of elements, taken alternately from traditional sources and from modern humanistic culture.

Modern Orthodoxy (as distinguished from Orthodoxy) attempted a different way that was, in fact, much closer to that of the original Enlightenment, its main contention being that there are two separate realms which may support each other and even complement and influence each other, but which still differ from each other in contents, methods and status. Here is an obvious reproduction of Mendelssohn's and Weisel's enlightened differential on "the Law of God" and "the Law of Humanity." One may describe modern Orthodoxy as acceptant of an already established Orthodoxy as the firm basis for second thoughts about the positive value of Emancipation and humanistic culture. Modern Orthodoxy sanctified as eternal and unchanging the same bulk of creeds and norms that were sanctified by Orthodoxy. These have been defined as a first and absolutely obligating realm sanctified by Divine revelation, yet, once they are so defined, they point beyond to the vast margins of the human autonomous realm in which the Jew is not only allowed, but even actually encouraged, by Torah to participate. The Jew should extend the light of religious morality and spirituality beyond the narrow religious circle in which Orthodoxy was content to close itself. Thus, Modern Orthodoxy was able to recognize the positive contents of Enlightenment, from an Orthodox point of view, and accept them not only as tools, but also as ends, though not the ultimate ones.

Such a claim necessitates, of course, a new unifying theology which will introduce humanism as a religious value, reveal the humanistic ethical considerations beyond many religious commandments, and, in the spirit of Enlightenment, legitimate humanistic studies even as a tool for a deeper understanding of Torah itself. On the other hand, it will establish the authority of super-rational Divine revelation as a first and absolutely necessary condition for a truly concise and obligating morality. This could be practically applied and implemented only by a set

of compromises, especially in the realm of religious education, and in the application of halakhic norms to social activity beyond the strictly ritualistic borders of a Jewish “Holy Community” in the diaspora.

The third intermediate type of modern Jewish religiosity is the so-called nationalistic Orthodoxy, or Religious Zionism, which may be explained as the difference between a direct confrontation with the contents of secular humanism as expressed by gentile society and gentile academic institutions, and an indirect confrontation with these contents through its reflection in the cultural or religious creativity of other movements *within the Jewish fold*. Contrary to Enlightenment itself, and contrary to Liberal, Conservative and Modern Orthodox Judaisms, the religious *Hibbat-Zion* and Zionist Orthodoxy after Herzl and the first Zionist Congress were not informed by a direct study of modern humanistic sources. The founders of these movements knew about the sciences, philosophies and literary artistic creativity of humanistic modernity only through their reflection in modern Hebrew Literature and in modern Jewish educational and communal—mainly political—institutional systems.

The motivation to re-evaluate these aspects of Enlightenment was, therefore, not the attraction of humanistic culture as such, not the attraction of Emancipation, but was, rather, the will to build bridges over chasms within the Jewish people, to unify it for the sake of a messianic Auto-Emancipation, which would include, necessarily, a comprehensive renaissance of national Jewish culture. A harmonious synthesis between Jewish traditional contents and positive secular contents was, therefore, a rediscovery of the national element within Jewish religiosity as a central, inherently creative power. Redemption meant a return of the people to its own original self, that is, a full revelation of that self in all the realms of human personal and collective responsibility.

This was, obviously, a positive response to a certain kind of modern European nationalistic idea, known to the Orthodox thinkers through the intermediacy of some Jewish secularistic thinkers. Yet, responding out of traditional, mainly Kabbalistic, resources, it put the whole concept of Jewish religious culture into a completely self-centered nationalistic perspective. Even that which the secularists regarded as derived from gentile sources was considered by such nationalistic Orthodox thinkers as disguisedly Jewish in origin. The Torah, which is the soul of the Jewish people, is verily the infinite source of all wisdom. Every human achievement is potentially contained in the Torah, flowing from its Divine fountains in response to human material or spiritual needs. It is, therefore, quite understandable that, while in exile, the Jewish people did not realize its cultural potentiality in its own narrow circle, whereas the gentile nations, in their free domains, had developed a rich earthly culture. Obviously, they had borrowed indirectly, and in a distorted way, from the ancient Jewish sources. Thus, Jewish assimilation-

ists could be “explained” as being attracted, unknowingly, by contents which were originally Jewish, and, once they returned to their national fold as secular Zionists, they would rediscover their own original Jewish selves and, carrying with them all of their outwardly acquired wisdom, would finally return to the Torah.

The renaissance of the Jewish people in its own land and in its own state serves, therefore, according to this view, as a necessary pre-condition for the creation of a unified Jewish culture out of its own sources. This culture would harmonize the “secular” with the “religious” in one comprehensive system and, while freely expressing the Jewish particularity, it would also be universally significant. Yet, practically speaking, this most daring attempt at harmonization could be implemented as an educational system only through a compromise which closely resembles that of Modern Orthodoxy, namely the educational system of *Torah Im Derekh Erez* (for the Zionist Orthodox it was, of course, *Derekh Erez Yisrael*).

Orthodox Zionist Theology has much in common with one more type of modern Jewish religiosity, generated by Enlightenment through its impact on the Zionist movement as such. This type of religiosity was only a trend because, though it was represented by very influential individual teachers like Moses Hess, A. D. Gordon, Ch. N. Bialik and M. Buber, whose influence affected many individuals in different movements, it did not crystalize into a separate movement. What is common to these thinkers, beside their attachment to the “spiritual” and not to the “political” version of Zionism, and beside their “organic” conception of the essence of a nation, is their creative commitment to the continuity of the Jewish sources and their conception of the Jewish religion as the expression of a unique “natural” quality of the Jewish people. Thus, whatever the Jewish people has created, or will create in the future, and whatever outside sources it has used, or will use, has been, and will be, “naturally” imbued by this unique quality to form an ever-renewed and ever-continuous Jewish culture.

Viewing this array of modern Jewish religious movements that were generated by Enlightenment, one may sum up with the claim that what was achieved is a change of the whole field in many different and contradictory ways, in some cases only partially, in other cases totally. We should, however, keep in mind the fact that even the most stubborn rejection of the changes proposed by Enlightenment was, in itself, an “imitative” change. Therefore, it seems that the only possible answer to the question as to whether the effects of Enlightenment were permanent or transient is that a change of the whole field, once effected, can never be transient; it is formative and, thus, it will continually inform further developments as a retained memory.

Of course, the effects of Enlightenment did not wash out former formative memories. On the contrary, in all of the variations of change

there was a cherished commitment to historical continuity, and its most characteristic quality was its dynamism. Having changed the old traditional field, it pushed towards a process of more changes through continued interpretative discoveries of the past. Even within the scope of our historical survey we have followed many developments, shaped by movements of “progress” and “return” beyond the first phase of “classical Enlightenment.” In fact, all of the above-mentioned modern religious movements should be described as “post-Enlightenment.” But this very dynamism holds within it, as a basic motivation, the main challenge and the main message of Enlightenment: the duty to respond positively to a modern secular culture that is based on rational, universal humanistic values.

Viewing the field of Jewish religious movements in the second half of the 20th century, one may discern the accumulation of many experiences and creative spiritual achievements far beyond the Enlightenment. One may discern even a strong inclination towards a “full” return to a point before the crisis of modernity, as we see a very radical inclination towards complete detachment from religion as well as from Jewishness. We cannot even guess how all of these inclinations will be consummated in established religious and non-religious movements as specific theologies, philosophies, educational systems and styles of life. However, we may take it for granted that, combined with other prior and later formative memories, the message of Enlightenment will be effectively retained in them all.

The Enlightenment, the Emancipation and the Jewish Religion

WALTER S. WURZBURGER

ONE WOULD HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE DESTRUCTION of the Temple in the year 70 C.E. to find events which had as decisive an impact upon the nature, function and scope of Judaism as the revolutionary changes wrought by the Emancipation and the Enlightenment. The mere fact that the distinguished Editor of this journal invited me to write on a subject pertaining to developments in "the Jewish religion" is in itself evidence of the radical transformation that took place when the Enlightenment and the Emancipation ushered in an entirely new era for the Jewish people. Before these epochmaking events it never occurred to Jews to look upon religion as a distinctive entity that could be separated from ethnic factors.

Significantly, there is no classical Hebrew word which really conveys the meaning associated with the term "religion." Jewishness and Judaism were not differentiated from one another. In their own self-perception, Jews constituted a holy people, not a purely religious community. Since religion and nation formed an organic unit, it was not possible to isolate religious and national components. As Yechezkel Kaufmann put it, Judaism represents a "religious ethnicism," which simply cannot be subsumed under the general rubric of religion.

The very description of the Jewish system of beliefs and practices as a religion stems from the desire to enable Jews to adjust to the demands of modernity. As long as Jews looked upon themselves as members of a distinctive nationality, they could hardly expect to receive the same civil rights as were accorded to members of the dominant nationality. But, since the modern secular state banished religion from the public domain and relegated it to the private sphere, it was possible for Jews to maintain their Jewish identity without jeopardizing their claims to full-fledged citizenship, provided they defined themselves as a religious denomination rather than as a nationality. The questions which Napoleon addressed to the Sanhedrin in France in order to determine whether Jews were eligible for civil rights or whether they should be treated as an unassimilable foreign body demonstrate how vital it was for Jews to renounce their status as a distinctive national group, if they expected to acquire the rights of citizenship in a modern secular state.

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To appreciate the revolutionary nature of this development, it must be borne in mind that, before the Emancipation, Jews residing within Christian states looked upon themselves as members of an autonomous Jewish community and formed a state within the state. Governed by their own laws, they lived within their own “portable homeland.” Under such conditions, Jewishness was not a matter of choice, but a given.

To be sure, Jews could theoretically opt out of the Jewish community by conversion to the majority religion. But, for all practical purposes, a variety of social, cultural and religious factors converged to create the kind of environment where being Jewish was simply accepted as a matter of fact. One automatically absorbed the life style, the values and the belief system of one’s environment. In the words of Leo Baeck, the ghetto atmosphere engendered “the piety of a milieu,” and, as Jacob Neusner observed, within such a setting there was hardly any need for any self-conscious theological convictions. As a general rule, one simply conformed to the ethos of the autonomous Jewish community in the same manner as one nowadays basically accepts the prevailing social norms without subjecting them to critical analysis. The term “*Yiddishkeit*,” which is frequently employed to describe the traditional life style, composed of “religious” and “secular” elements, illustrates the extent to which, in the pre-emancipatory era, the Jewish community as such possessed normative authority.

It is important to bear in mind that, unlike other religions, Judaism requires no initiation ceremonies like baptism or confirmation to qualify for admission into the community. It is by being born of a Jewish mother that, irrespective of one’s ideological or religious beliefs, one automatically becomes a member of the people of the Covenant. Since one willy-nilly belonged to the Jewish community, it was regarded as self-evident that the community had the right to impose its standards and norms upon individuals.

When Moses Mendelssohn objected to the employment of sanctions to secure compliance with the religious norms of the Jewish community, he expressed the attitudes of the Enlightenment rather than of the tradition. There were, of course, cogent reasons for his unequivocal opposition to the methods and procedures employed by autonomous Jewish communities in the pre-modern era. Convinced as he was that Jews could attain equal rights as citizens only in societies that would grant full religious freedom to all inhabitants, he had to de-legitimize any form of religious coercion as incompatible with the interests of genuine religion. For Mendelssohn, it was axiomatic that the profession of a religious faith must be a matter of inner, personal conviction, not something imposed by external pressures. In his view, tolerance of religious non-conformity was a religious imperative, since the cause of religion could be advanced only by persuasion and not by recourse to force.

To be sure, many traditionalists argued that compliance with Halakhic requirements, regardless of the motives prompting observance, represented an intrinsic religious value. The mere practice of the Halakhah was expected to yield enormous spiritual benefits in keeping with the well-known Talmudic adage, "Would it be that they had abandoned Me (i.e., God) but kept my Torah." It was widely believed that any form of religious observance, no matter how unworthy the motives, was better than none. Did not the Rabbinic sages conclude their statement with the explanation that the light of the Torah would ultimately bring the non-believer back to the proper faith?

One can therefore appreciate why so many champions of traditionalism were outraged by Mendelssohn's proposal to renounce the employment of coercive measures for the purpose of securing compliance with religious norms. After all, Judaism had always revolved around the Halakhah, which, when necessary, resorted to communal sanctions to enforce the religious Law governing the community. To eliminate all sanctions was tantamount to reducing Judaism to a purely personal faith and to divest it completely of its public dimension. Mendelssohn's proposal, for all his avowed loyalty to traditional law, struck his opponents as a radical departure from what was perceived as the legitimate exercise of a valuable prerogative. The autonomous Jewish community treasured its autonomy because it enabled it to form a truly "holy community" governed by the Halakhah, and not merely an association of individual Jews who voluntarily opted for the practice of their faith.

In retrospect, it becomes readily understandable why so many spokesmen for traditional Judaism were frightened by the Emancipation, which, as it turned out, exacted a terrible toll in terms of Jewish loyalties. To begin with, once the Halakhah was deprived of its status as the official code of an autonomous Jewish community, the overwhelming majority of modern Jews totally rejected its binding authority. Moreover, intermarriage and total assimilation into the majority culture has reached alarming proportions. The "open society" has eroded the ties to Judaism and the sense of identification with the Jewish people to such an extent that the very survival of the Jewish community is imperilled.

That Jewish survival has emerged as one of the main issues of the contemporary Jewish agenda points to the precariousness of Jewish existence amidst the tidal waves of assimilation and disintegration. Whereas, until the Emancipation, the desire to survive as Jews could be taken for granted, nowadays various religious and secular movements compete with each other in the marketplace of ideas, not so much on the merits of their ideologies, but, rather, on the basis of their effectiveness as instrumentalities of Jewish survival. It is highly revealing that even advertisements for Jewish education stress its importance as a key factor

in insuring Jewish survival rather than its contribution to the enhancement of the quality of Jewish life.

Although the radical upheavals in the Jewish condition are usually attributed to the Emancipation and abandonment of the ghetto, actually it was the ethos of the Enlightenment which not only made the Emancipation possible but also maximized the spiritual hazards that the new socio-cultural and political climate posed to the Jewish people. Had the Enlightenment not eroded loyalties to particular revealed religions which were challenged to justify their claims before the bar of reason, the collapse of the ghetto walls in itself would hardly have precipitated the kind of mass defections from Judaism that we witnessed in the post-Emancipation era. But the opportunity to participate in the social, political and economic life of the non-Jewish world beckoned at a time when a triumphant rationalism branded all forms of revealed religion as benighted relics of the past and thus undermined the very foundations of Jewish faith, which rests upon the premise that Israel constitutes God's "chosen people." Viewed from the vantage point of the Enlightenment, the belief in the Supernatural Revelation of a Covenant between God and Israel imposing a special set of obligations upon a particular people represented a "scandal of particularity" which was totally incompatible with the universalistic categories demanded by the ethos of the period.

In an age that worshipped reason and regarded human autonomy as the highest moral and spiritual value, the unconditional surrender of man to God's will that was demanded by Jewish traditional faith could hardly appeal to those who subscribed to the tenets of the Enlightenment. It is noteworthy that Kant, who personified the spirit of the Enlightenment and made reason the sole arbiter of morality, went so far as to condemn Abraham for his readiness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, notwithstanding the fact that, according to the Biblical account, this unconditional obedience to a divine command was the very apex of Abraham's religious development. It is, therefore, not surprising that new religious movements arose which attempted to reformulate Judaism in such a manner that its religious demands would appear eminently reasonable and, above all, would not interfere with the integration of the Jew into the general community. The desire to "reform" Judaism and reduce it to a universalistic "ethical monotheism," mislabeled "prophetic Judaism," was essentially an attempt to adjust Judaism to an age which had unlimited confidence in the capacity of human reason to find solutions to all social, political and economic problems, once the reactionary forces of revealed religion were divested of their positions of influence.

With the Emancipation and the Enlightenment converging to challenge the very foundations of Orthodoxy, it becomes readily understandable why so many Orthodox leaders were so antagonistic to the

new developments and denounced as un-Jewish the approach of Mendelssohn and his followers in the Haskalah movement, who advocated that Jews avail themselves of the socio-cultural opportunities that were available to them in order to qualify for full admission into modern society. There were some who went so far as to attempt to roll back history. In Hungary, representatives of Orthodoxy petitioned the governmental authorities to rescind the Edict of Emancipation. The Orthodox leadership was apprehensive lest the removal of the ghetto walls bring about total assimilation into the majority culture. In their opinion, it was better for individual Jews to forego the benefits of the beckoning economic and cultural opportunities of the Emancipation than to jeopardize their spiritual identity and distinctiveness.

To be sure, these efforts to turn back the clock of history were of no avail. Jews in Western Europe continued to be exposed to the challenge posed by the dissolution of the autonomous Jewish community. Under these circumstances, the bulk of Orthodox Rabbis felt that their only recourse was unequivocal opposition to any tampering with the traditional life style. The hostility to the spirit of the Enlightenment can be gauged by the fact that some Rabbis felt constrained to ban the reading of the works of Mendelssohn, in spite of the fact that the latter had insisted upon absolute loyalty to Jewish law. Any form of deviation from past usage and, especially, exposure to modern culture, such as science, philosophy, literature, etc., was strictly prohibited. It was in keeping with this attitude that Hungarian Orthodoxy coined the slogan that "any form of innovation was Biblically prohibited."

While the overwhelming majority of traditional Rabbis followed this strategy, there was a tiny but articulate minority that felt that the Emancipation and the Enlightenment, for all their manifest dangers to the spiritual well-being of Jews, should be hailed as a new opportunity for the development of a flourishing Jewish life. There was no need to reject the blessings of the Emancipation, which could be enjoyed without sacrificing absolute loyalty to the teachings of the Torah. Instead of engaging in rear-guard actions designed to halt the spread of Enlightenment values among observant Jews, Orthodoxy should reverse its strategy and make it clear that exposure to modern culture did not compromise one's religious integrity, because the ideals of human progress were perfectly compatible with absolute loyalty to the teachings of the Torah.

The most articulate exponent of this approach was Samson Raphael Hirsch, who contended that the Emancipation, far from presenting a religious handicap, created superior conditions for the application of Torah to life. Since Jews were no longer excluded from contributing to the intellectual, scientific, economic and socio-political activities that molded the culture of their time, they were in a much better position to realize their religious ideal of subjecting the entire

range of human activities to the guidance of Torah. Hirsch was convinced that his ideology of *Torah im Derekh Erez* was not only pragmatically necessary to protect Judaism from the encroachments of modernity, but represented, even from a religious point of view, a significant advance over the traditional stance which prevented the Jew from bringing to bear the values and insights of the Torah upon the culture of the world. It was for this reason that Hirsch saw in the Emancipation and the Enlightenment not so much a challenge to traditional faith as an opportunity to strive for the religious ideal, implicit in the conception of Torah as a "Torah of life," which he interpreted as mandating that the entire gamut of human activities that comprise the *Derekh Erez* of a given era be shaped by the Torah.

It must be realized that, for Hirsch, the values of the Enlightenment were not inimicable to Judaism but constituted insights derived from what he termed the "inner Revelation" which supplemented and complemented the teachings of the Sinaitic "external Revelation." In the Hirschian scheme, the former, provided they did not conflict with the latter, were not dismissed as religiously irrelevant but were endowed with enormous spiritual significance.

So marked was the transformation in the outlook and lifestyle of the devotees of Hirschian Orthodoxy that it has been dubbed "Neo-Orthodoxy." In his excellent study, *Death and Birth of Judaism*, Professor Jacob Neusner has contended that, because of its radical deviation from the pre-emancipatory life-style, this type of Orthodoxy can really no longer qualify as a continuation of the traditional approach that characterized pre-modern Judaism. The readiness to condone involvement with secular culture represents, according to Professor Neusner, a manifestation of "selective piety," which refuses to abide by all the provisions of the tradition. But it must be realized that one could certainly interpret classical Judaism in a manner that condones or even encourages participation in the general culture. The reason why Professor Neusner is correct in noting that post-Emancipation Orthodoxy represents a radical break with the past is due, not to its changed attitudes towards secular values but to the socio-political reality that the Emancipation had completely shattered the mold in which Judaism was previously cast. The dissolution of the autonomous Jewish community which demanded obedience to Halakhic norms from all its members created altogether radically new conditions where the adoption of a religious faith ultimately rested upon individual choice. Since Jews no longer formed a separate polity which was governed by Halakhah, the authority of the individual human conscience replaced the authority which formerly, in the age of faith, was vested in the autonomous Jewish community. As Peter Berger has pointed out, modernity has given rise to the "heretical imperative." In a pluralistic society, which offers a variety

of religious and secular options, religious identification became a matter of personal choice rather than a social necessity.

Having lost not only its monopoly but even its hegemony in the Jewish community, Orthodoxy had to compete with other Jewish denominations which no longer acknowledged the binding authority of the Halakhah. To do so effectively, it had to engage in self-definition. Until the Emancipation, there was no need to spell out that Judaism was synonymous with unconditional submission to the authority of the Halakhah, which was acknowledged as the revealed will of God. But, in the wake of the encounter with modernity, it became necessary for Orthodoxy to engage in a self-conscious formulation of its basic tenets.

The mere fact that traditional Jews had to resort to such terms as "loyal to the Law," "Torah-true" or "Orthodox" to characterize their religious commitments dramatically underscores the drastic change from conditions that prevailed in the pre-modern Jewish community when the binding authority of Halakhic norms was taken for granted.

With Jewish identity becoming a matter of individual choice, there arose the need to provide a rationale for identification with any particular segment of the Jewish community and to engage in the self-conscious formulations of Jewish theologies or secular ideologies of survival—a development that paralleled the conditions that prevailed when medieval Jewish philosophy had to confront the claims of various philosophical systems which clashed with the belief system of revealed religions.

One can, of course, plausibly argue that adherence to religious norms on account of sincere personal conviction is far superior to the kind of piety which merely amounts to the uncritical acceptance of the religious life style of one's environment. The purely voluntary nature of religious commitment that is the hallmark of modernity adds dimensions to religious observance which were lacking when the adoption of a religious life style was dictated by a host of societal pressures. But it must be recognized that Jews paid a heavy price in terms of alienation, erosion of group loyalties and de-Judaization for the material and spiritual advantages of modernity.

It is an exercise in futility to debate whether, on balance, the Jewish people gained or lost by the Emancipation. No amount of wishful thinking on the part of the most reactionary defenders of the ghetto mentality could affect the historic realities. It is, however, a matter of disagreement whether Orthodoxy could have stemmed the mass defections from its ranks had it, originally, not been so frightened by the new developments that it compelled its adherents to choose between loyalty to Torah and acceptance of the benefits of modernity.

It is common knowledge that, even within contemporary Orthodoxy, sharp differences of opinion exist with respect to the legitimacy of exposure to the values of modernity. The conflict between the *Datium*

(the religious) and the *Haredim* (so called ultra-Orthodox) essentially revolves around the desirability of accommodating those values of modernity which do not come into direct conflict with religious norms.

Since the Emancipation was largely achieved as the result of the privatization of religious faith and its exclusion from the public domain, it became tempting for Jews to define themselves in purely denominational terms. With religion excluded from the public square, religious differences supposedly had no bearing upon one's civic status. It is highly revealing that the most prominent German-Jewish organization was named "Central Association of German Citizens of the Mosaic Faith"—a term which was adopted because it corresponded to the expression "Christian faith" and therefore lent itself to underscoring the exclusively religious nature of Jewish distinctiveness.

The one-sided emphasis upon the religious dimension and the disregard of the nationalistic components of Judaism gave impetus to the formation of completely independent denominations which, especially in Hungary, resulted in the breakup of the Jewish community and its splitting into completely separate groups. Significantly, in areas of Eastern Europe which were under Czarist rule and, therefore, did not benefit from the Emancipation, the most traditional elements resisted secessionist tendencies and were committed to the preservation of a united Jewish community structure.

Contrary to all optimistic predictions, the Emancipation and the Enlightenment did not end the plight of the Jew. Antisemitism did not require any theological justification. It soon became evident that the secularization of society was no panacea for what ailed the Jewish body politic. It was against this background that the Zionist movement came into being.

Among the most ardent opponents of the movement were not only Reform spokesmen who viewed a return to Zion as a reversion to a tribal conception of Judaism and who clung to the hope that the march of progress would ultimately cure all ills, but, also, leaders of Orthodoxy who, while professing faith in the ultimate Return to Zion as an integral part of the Messianic Redemption, nevertheless maintained that Jews were supposed to wait passively for the arrival of the Supernatural Redemption and, therefore, were not permitted to take the initiative in re-establishing their national homeland. Exile was divine punishment. It was sacrilegious to take matters into their own hands and attempt to solve "the Jewish problem" by socio-political means.

It cannot be gainsaid that, especially in countries where Jews enjoyed full civil rights, opposition to Zionism on religious grounds was in some measure inspired by the desire not to jeopardize the gains of the Emancipation. But it must also be realized that genuine religious concerns were involved. As a matter of fact, the most vehement opposition to Zionist aspirations came from quarters that had made no

concessions at all to modernity and had retained a totally pietistic and quietistic orientation.

Other Orthodox groups, such as Mizrahi, espoused a less quietistic approach to Judaism and were perfectly willing to endorse human initiatives to find a solution to the plight of Jewish homelessness, just as they were ready to accept other tenets of modernity, like exposure to secular education. It is noteworthy that Isaac Breuer, while disavowing secular Zionism and insisting upon total segregation from non-orthodox movements, contended that, in the light of changed realities, the Hirschian ideal of *Torah im Derekh Erez* mandated the establishment of a national Jewish Homeland where the religious ideals of the Torah could be applied to mold the collective life of the nation.

Those segments of Orthodoxy which endorse involvement in the modern world have absorbed many of the values of the Enlightenment to such an extent that they place a premium on human activity. Efforts designed to ameliorate the socio-political condition of the Jewish people are not viewed as a concession to secularity but as an opportunity to implement religious imperatives such as *Yishuv Haarez* (settlement of the land of Israel) and *Yishuv Haolam* (Making the world inhabitable for human beings)—themes that are prevalent in the works of such seminal Orthodox thinkers as Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik. It is in this spirit that, with some notable exceptions among the devotees of Hirschian Orthodoxy, they welcome the state of Israel not only as a paramount instrumentality for Jewish survival, but, also, as an opportunity to lead the fuller Jewish life that the state of Israel provides for all Jews.

With the benefit of the hindsight of the post-Holocaust era, we find it easy to dismiss the naive optimism which characterized the Emancipation and Enlightenment. After Hitler and Auschwitz, we can longer profess faith in the triumph of reason and progress. Moreover, the Holocaust has demonstrated that being Jewish is irreducible to belonging to a religious denomination but involves membership—to borrow Rav Soloveitchik's terminology—in a Covenantal community of fate and faith. But while we have extricated ourselves from some of the shallow perceptions of bygone eras, we still have not mastered the art of combining our Jewish particularity with openness to the values of modernity in a manner that minimizes the risk that Jewish identity be corroded by what Walter Lippmann called "the acids of modernity."

Inside or Outside? Emancipation and the Dilemmas of Conservative Judaism

NEIL GILLMAN

THAT CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM—AND THE Positive-Historical School, its predecessor in mid-nineteenth century Europe—emerged as one of the range of responses to Jewish Emancipation is clear. Our issue is to study how that original impulse shaped the distinctive style and ideology of this Movement almost to this very day.

On the most superficial level, the founding fathers of the Movement welcomed the basic assumptions of Emancipation. They sought the integration of the Jewish community into the political, socio-economic and cultural structures of European and, later, American civilization. In return, they agreed to accommodate the dimension of nationhood or peoplehood which had been an integral part of Jewish self-awareness from biblical times on, and to redefine Judaism as essentially a system of religious beliefs and practices, implicitly on the model of Christianity.¹

If I refer to this dimension of the issue as “superficial,” it is in no

1. True, the rhetoric of Conservative Judaism has always stressed that, in contrast to the other two religious responses to Emancipation, Classical Reform and Neo-Orthodoxy, Conservative Judaism has never known an *anti-Zionist* (read “anti-nationalist”) bias. Nevertheless, until quite recently at least, its support for political (as opposed to cultural, *Aḥad Ha-Amic*) Zionism has been noticeably ambivalent. With the exception of Israel Friedlander and, somewhat later, Mordecai Kaplan, no one of the founding fathers can be identified as a fervent Zionist. Solomon Schechter’s 1906 “Zionism: A Statement” (anthologized in his *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* [New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1959], p. 91ff.) is clearly Schechter speaking for himself, not as President of the Seminary and head of the Conservative Movement. (See Schechter’s own disclaimer in the Preface to his *Seminary Addresses* pp. xxiii–xxv, which also articulates his ongoing ambivalence about the emerging shape of Zionism.) On Friedlander’s contributions to Zionism, see Baila Round Shargel, *Practical Dreamer: Israel Friedlander and the Shaping of American Judaism* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1985), Ch.8. However, Shargel’s claim that “(a)mong the proudest legacies of Conservative Judaism is its early and wholehearted espousal of Zionism” seems, to this writer, somewhat tendentious. From the outset, the Movement assumed the continuing legitimacy and vitality of diaspora Judaism. Indeed, it would have been simply incongruous for it to do otherwise! The “Israel and the Diaspora” section in the recently published (1988) *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*, which espouses a dual-center model for Jewish life today, clearly reflects this ambivalence.

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way to minimize its impact. It is clear, however, that the renegotiation of Judaism's traditional religion/nationhood nexus, which was at the heart of the agenda of the first generation of post-Emancipation thinkers, has become largely irrelevant, especially here in America. We have been able to smuggle in a good deal of nationalism under the rubric of religion and with the protection of the constitutional bar against the state's infringement into the domain of religion. We have come a long way from being ". . . Frenchmen professing the religion of Moses;" and why not, for isn't our commitment to *am yisrael* itself a cardinal *mizvah*?

But on a more profound and enduring level, the impact of the Emancipation was felt less in the *fact* of that renegotiation than in its *substance*, namely, in the reconceptualization of Jewish religion that was perceived to be mandated if the integration of Judaism into European cultural life was to be achieved. It is the thesis of this paper that this reconceptualization has haunted Conservative Judaism up to this very day, and that it is singularly responsible for the ambivalences that have characterized its ideological posture for the better part of a century. In fact, if we now have a perspective from which we can study the early ideological history of the Movement, it is precisely because, within the past decade, this complex of issues has begun to be addressed, for the first time, in an open fashion.

The core of that reconceptualization was propounded by the school that was known as *Wissenschaft des Judentums* or the Science of Judaism. The members of the *Wissenschaft* school argued that if the Jewish *people* is to be integrated into modern European political life, then Jewish *religion* must be integrated into modern European intellectual life as well. In fact, they argued, the latter was a pre-condition of the former, and the key to achieving that latter goal was to subject Jewish religion to the "scientific" temper that was becoming the hallmark of nineteenth century European thought.

Both of these goals are explicit in the manifesto of the new movement as articulated by Immanuel Wolf (1799–1829), Secretary of the Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews, in the first issue (1822) of its journal, the *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He begins by capturing the spirit of the new scientific age. Science, he notes,

. . . treats the object of study in and for itself, for its own sake, and not for any special purpose or definite intention. It begins without any pre-conceived opinion and is not concerned with the final result. Its aim is neither to put its object in a favorable, nor in an unfavorable light . . . but to show it as it is. Science is self-sufficient and is in itself an essential need of the human spirit. [And he concludes by suggesting the broader social agenda of the school.] The Jews . . . must raise themselves and their principle to the level of a science, for this is the attitude of the European world. On this level the relationship of strangeness in which Jews and Judaism have hitherto stood to the outside world must vanish. And

if one day a bond is to join the whole of humanity, then it is *the bond of science, the bond of pure rationality, the bond of truth.*²

Factual accuracy, normative neutrality, the emancipation of scholarship from belief, an open stance to the scholarly methodologies that were used in the study of any other culture, the quest for truth whatever that truth might be and whatever its source or its implications—these were to become the guiding principles for the study of Judaism as well. And the expectation was that this approach would dispel the anti-Jewish animus that pervaded European culture, would engender Jewish dignity and self-respect, and would legitimize the integration of the Jewish community into European life. The symbol of that integration would become the introduction of Jewish studies into the curriculum of European universities and into the European scholarly agenda.

In short, the gateway to emancipation was the secularization of the study of Torah. Jewish religious texts and traditions were to be studied in precisely the same manner as any other cultural tradition. The hallmark of this new methodology was its equally new historical consciousness. At the root, all *Wissenschaft* scholars were historians. Ismar Schorsch, currently Chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary and student of the *Wissenschaft* movement, specifies the role that this historical consciousness assumed in nineteenth century Europe. It was, he notes, both “authority and medium.”

Construed as authority, a proper reading of Jewish history could yield the indispensable guidelines and validating principles to determine the future shape of Judaism. Invoked as medium, Jewish history could readily provide an interpretation of Judaism in terms of the idealistic idiom of the age.

In short, Schorsch notes, in modern Europe, history would play the role that philosophy played in the Middle Ages; it would provide the idiom for the integration of Judaism into the reigning culture at large.³

2. “On the Concept of a Science of Judaism” in *The Jew in the Modern World*, Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 194–195. Italics in the original. The editors’ introduction (pp. 183–185) to this section of their anthology is a concise study of both the impulses which generated the *Wissenschaft* school and of its inherent tensions. Also illuminating are the selections from the writings of the two outstanding representatives of the school, Leopold Zunz (pp. 196–204) and Moritz Steinschneider (pp. 205–207).

3. *Heinrich Graetz: The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, translated, edited and introduced by Ismar Schorsch (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1975), p. 10. It is one of the fascinating ironies of recent Jewish history that Professor Schorsch, himself both a product and student of the *Wissenschaft* approach to the study of Judaism, is now, of course, Chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary. In this latter role, he has been singularly successful in addressing and helping to resolve all of the issues raised in this study. The comparison with the role of philosophy in the Middle Ages is also noted by Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, and Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), pp. 85–86.

Of these two roles, that of authority and that of medium, the latter was clearly time-bound; by the end of the century, philosophical idealism had had its say. But history's role as authority is another matter. Its effect was nothing less than a radical transformation of Jewish self-consciousness—and that, in two ways.

First, the appeal to history as authority is a double-edged sword. History itself is mute; it must be “read,” and it can be read as manifesting either a conservative or a liberating impulse. In its conservative voice, history teaches us about continuities, about what has persisted despite the change in eras and, by implication, it determines what must be maintained today despite all of the pressures for change. In its liberating voice, history teaches us about the discontinuities, the breaks with the past, the pattern of constant change or development and, again by implication, it legitimizes similar breaks in the present.⁴ But which of these voices should be heeded? More to the point, once history is appealed to as authority, is it at all possible to control which of these voices will be heard? And, in the last analysis, if history does become the source of authority, it is possible to avoid the relativization of all forms of Jewish religious expression that it implies?

Second, when that appeal to history is combined with the critical temper of the age, what emerges is a new historiography that is, itself, a radical repudiation of all classical attempts to understand Judaism. Yosef Yerushalmi pinpoints the impact of that repudiation:

To the degree that this historiography is indeed “modern” and demands to be taken seriously . . . it must stand in sharp opposition to its own subject matter, not on this or that detail, but concerning the vital core: the belief that divine providence is not only an ultimate but an active causal factor in Jewish history, and the related belief in the uniqueness of Jewish history itself.⁵

But then, why Judaism? Specifically, why Jewish religion?

These ambivalences—along with their implicit secularizing/relativizing implications—which the critical/historical temper introduced into the understanding of Jewish religion can be seen, fully formed, in the thought of the two ideological grandfathers of Conservative Judaism: Zechariah Frankel in mid-nineteenth century Europe, and, half-a-century later, Solomon Schechter in America.

The issue over which Frankel resigned from the 1845 Conference of Reform Rabbis in Frankfort was “Is Prayer in the Hebrew tongue objectively necessary?” The choice of the issue is itself significant, for Hebrew as the language of prayer is nowhere mandated by the *halakhah*. Frankel is clear on the grounds for his break. According to the transcript of the discussion, “. . . he (Frankel) stands on the ground of *positive, historical Judaism*. In order to understand what it means in

4. Schorsch, p. 11.

5. Yerushalmi, p. 89.

the present, one must first look to the past and to the path which Judaism has traveled.”⁶ He therefore disagrees with the decision because it “. . . eliminates the historical element which has weight and power in every religion. In my opinion this is not the spirit of preserving but of destroying positive historical Judaism.”⁷ Frankel’s address to the Conference is an eloquent invocation of the Hebrew language as “. . . sanctified by millenia. . . .”⁸ Note well that the source of this sanctity is not God, not theology, not the Bible, and certainly not *halakhah*; it is, rather, “millenia,” or Jewish history, and, by implication, the Jewish community itself which ultimately has the authority to determine what religious forms it wants to sanctify. But it should be noted that Frankel’s audience at this Conference was the assembly of Reform rabbis whose vote against the necessity of Hebrew was also based on an appeal to history and to the will of the community, as they read it.⁹

But Frankel’s dilemma emerges in an even more striking manner in his major scholarly work, *Darkhei ha-Mishnah* (1859). Here, the stakes are much higher, for the issue is not the Hebrew language but the *halakhah* itself. His goal is to develop what he called “a developmental history of *halakha*.” According to Schorsch,

. . . Frankel set out to introduce the concept of time into the study of *halakha*, thus paralleling Zunz’s brilliant work on the evolution of *midrashic* literature. [And, Schorsch concludes] . . . there is no gainsaying the radical secularization inherent in the enterprise. . . . Frankel had transformed the *halakhic* system into the product of human hands.¹⁰

The programmatic implications of this enterprise are spelled out in Frankel’s “On Changes in Judaism” (1845), which is included, significantly, as the first selection in *Tradition and Change: The Development of Conservative Judaism*—the first major anthology of writings on American Conservative Judaism (1958). Frankel’s claim is that Judaism has always sanctioned changes in belief and practice because “. . . time has a force and might which must be taken account of.” But on the other hand, the Jew must be able to resist “. . . the blandishments of the times.” Thus both “. . . the divine value and historical basis of Judaism” must be affirmed, and “. . . by introducing some changes, (Judaism) may achieve some agreement with the concepts and conditions of the time.” Who, then, decides what must be preserved and what changed? Not surprisingly, “(t)he entire community of Israel.” That

6. From the summary of Frankel’s remarks to the Conference, cited in *The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook of its European Origins*, W. Gunther Plaut ed. (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, Ltd.), p. 86.

7. From Frankel’s letter of resignation from the Conference, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 88.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

9. See the “Declaration of the Rabbinical Conference regarding the letter of Dr. Frankel” in *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.

10. “Zacharias Frankel and the European Origins of Conservative Judaism,” *JUDAISM*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Summer 1981): 352.

which was adopted by the entire community of Israel and was accepted by the people and become a part of its life, can not be changed by any authority.¹¹ But that generosity is quickly curtailed, for the community is “. . . a heavy unharmonious body and its will is difficult to recognize,” which is why the process of introducing these changes requires the guidance of scholars. “Knowledge and mastery of the law supply the sanctity . . .” (sic!), but then again, these “. . . can be attained by everybody.”¹²

It is hardly surprising, then, that Frankel's ideological stance and his program were assailed both from the left and from the right. His former colleagues at the Rabbinical Conference insisted that “(t)he Assembly cannot admit that the foundation of historic tradition is denied if one prays in a non-Hebraic tongue” for did not the Talmudists sanction prayer in Aramaic?¹³ And from Samson Raphael Hirsch, on the right, came a series of questions on how The Jewish Theological Seminary at Breslau, and Frankel, who became its first director (1854), understood revelation, Scripture, rabbinic law, and custom—questions which Frankel could only ignore. “What will *revelation* mean in the forthcoming Seminary?” Hirsch asks. “For Orthodox Judaism, it is the direct word of the personal, one God to man; for it, ‘God spoke to Moses’ is a simply supranatural fact just as one man speaks to another. Do the leaders of the Seminary acknowledge this Orthodox belief?”¹⁴ Indeed, Frankel's deeply ambivalent stance could be maintained only by studiously avoiding these theological issues, particularly the issue of revelation, which would have forced him to confront the status of Torah as the ultimate authority and would have jeopardized both his scholarly work and his entire program.

Five decades later, in America, all of the elements of this posture can be seen in the work of Solomon Schechter, who identifies the stance of what he calls “the historical school” as “. . . enlightened Scepticism combined with a staunch conservatism. . . .” The Bible itself is not the authority, but, rather, “Tradition.” More precisely, “. . . the center of

11. Mordecai Waxman, ed. (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1958), pp. 47–48.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

13. Plaut, *Op. cit.*, p. 89.

14. Cited in W. Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1965), Vol. 2, p. 45. In retrospect, the importance of this founder of modern Neo-Orthodoxy must not be underestimated. He was neither a great scholar nor a profound theologian, but he should be credited for articulating what has become the classic response of modern Orthodoxy to Reform and Conservative Judaism. See, e.g., in his “Religion Allied to Progress” in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, *Op. cit.*, pp. 177–181: “To them (Reform), progress is the absolute and religion is governed by it; to us, religion is the absolute. For them, religion is valid only to the extent that it does not interfere with progress; for us, progress is valid only to the extent that it does not interfere with religion. That is all the difference. But this difference is abysmal.” (p. 180) Indeed it is!

authority is actually removed from the Bible and placed in some *living body*, which, by reason of its being in touch with the ideal aspirations and the religious needs of the age, is best able to determine the nature of the Secondary Meaning . . . ,” itself the product of “. . . changing historical influences.” Hence, Schechter’s celebrated “Catholic Israel” as the source of religious authority. Indeed, God may well have chosen the Torah, and Moses His servant, and Israel His people, but—startlingly!—“. . . God’s choice invariably coincides with the wishes of Israel.” And again, “. . . the sanction of Judaism is the practice actually in vogue. Its consecration is the consecration of general use. . . .”¹⁵

Schechter confesses to his own deeply felt ambivalence about this posture, “. . . this new rival of revelation in the shape of history.”¹⁶ But, significantly, he nowhere offers his own, theological understanding of revelation, and the essay itself concludes with a reaffirmation that “. . . (t)he main strength of this (Historical) school lies in its scientific work, for which Judaism will always be under a sense of deep gratitude.”¹⁷

It was Schechter, more than anyone else, who molded the culture of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and of its offshoot, Conservative Judaism in America. The Seminary was on the brink of dissolution when he assumed the presidency of the school in 1902. He assembled that faculty of scholarly giants—men such as Louis Ginzberg, Alexander Marx, Israel Friedlander, Israel Davidson and Mordecai Kaplan—that established the school’s academic reputation. To the public, the school was known as “Schechter’s Seminary,” and the Seminary’s own rhetoric identified itself as “the fountainhead” of Conservative Judaism.

Not surprisingly, then, the culture of both school and movement inherited the ambivalences of its founders. For a variety of reasons, until the 1988 *Emet Ve-Emunah*, neither school nor movement chose to issue a formal platform on the model of Reform’s Pittsburgh Platform (1885) or its reformulation in the Columbus Platform (1937). First, platforms of this kind tend to be exclusive and divisive—witness the “conservative” break-away that followed the formulation of the Pittsburgh Platform and led directly to the founding of the Seminary—whereas the founders of the Seminary saw themselves as a broad coalition of all anti-Reformist groupings in America.¹⁸ Second, Reform, as the insur-

15. From Schechter’s “Historical Judaism,” the Introduction to his *First Studies in Judaism*, as excerpted in Waxman (ed.), *Op. cit.*, pp. 94–95.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

18. It is worth noting that, in Schechter’s writings, terms such as “Conservative” (sometimes with a lower case “c”), “traditional” and even “Orthodox” are all used, almost synonymously, as characterizations of the Movement which he represented. See his *Seminary Addresses* . . . , pp. xx, xxii, and his “The Work of Heaven,” in Waxman (ed.), *Op. cit.*, p. 165.

rectionist group, may well have had to justify its break with the past. The Seminary, for its part, represented the classical tradition; it required no further justification. But more significantly, any attempt to formulate a coherent statement of principles would have exhibited the deeply rooted tensions at the heart of the thinking of its founders and might well have stymied the enterprise as a whole from the outset.¹⁹

These tensions were omnipresent within the walls of the Seminary throughout the better part of its first century. They emerge most clearly in the conflict between the Seminary's scholarly enterprise and its religious/*halakhic* stance.

From the outset, the heart of the Seminary was its Rabbinical School. But the model of the rabbi which it sought to train made it, in actuality, a Western graduate school of higher Jewish studies. This was evident, first, in the strikingly academic character of its Rabbinical School curriculum, one of the two features—the other was its *halakhic* traditionalism—which would distinguish this academy from its Reform rival, the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.²⁰

The Seminary's curriculum was heavily text-centered. It demanded mastery of the Hebrew language, and courses in rabbinic (Talmud, Midrash and Codes) and biblical texts were required during every semester of residence. Course work in History was allotted somewhat less class time, in Philosophy and Hebrew Literature (medieval and modern) even less. But courses in rabbinic professional skills—Homiletics, Education, "Practical Theology" (where the rabbinical student was taught how to perform weddings, funerals and the like) and, somewhat later, Pastoral Counselling—were relegated to the periphery and to the final years of study. It was assumed that the young rabbi would pick up these skills by himself in his first years of practice. Primarily, the rabbi's authority rested on his academic mastery of the classical tradition. He was to be a scholar, a miniature version of his teachers. In fact, it was commonly, and somewhat cynically, assumed by the student body that the outstanding students in the school would be encouraged to pursue a scholarly career; the less accomplished could safely become rabbis. (Fortunately, that kind of innuendo has completely disappeared from Seminary Faculty rhetoric for some time now.)

Second, the school was, from the start, deeply committed to the *Wissenschaft* style of scholarship. More than one member of its Faculty was

19. On Conservative Judaism's ideological ambivalence, see Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*, New, Augmented Edition (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), Ch. VII; and Sidney H. Schwarz, "Conservative Judaism's 'Ideology' Problem," *American Jewish History*, Vol. LXXIV, No. 12, (December, 1984): 148–157. The latter traces the Movement's various unsuccessful attempts to write an ideological platform.

20. The analysis that follows reflects, primarily, the author's own experience in the Seminary's Rabbinical School from 1954 to 1960. I am convinced, however, that it is an accurate reflection of Seminary educational policy from the turn of the century until, at least, the seventies of this century.

wont to claim: "I teach Torah at the Seminary much as I would teach it at Yale or Harvard." Higher criticism of both biblical (*Nevi'im* and *Ketubim* from the outset and, eventually, *Humash* as well) and—potentially much more dangerous—of talmudic texts, was the norm. The common goal was to uncover the *p'shat* or literal meaning of the text, and every available scholarly resource was employed to that end. Historicism was rampant throughout. It was assumed that the tradition was in constant flux, that every generation rewrote the substance of the system of Jewish belief and practice in response to changing cultural conditions. The impact of economic, sociological and political factors was openly deliberated. Borrowings from other cultures were assumed and traced.²¹ Rabbinic ordination took place at Commencement Exercises that were identical to those of any American university: caps, gowns, hoods, a commencement address, the conferring of "degrees in course" and the rest; there was no formal ritual of ordination (until 1985 when a formal *Siyum* for Rabbinical School graduates, preceding the school's Commencement Exercises, was instituted). The primary qualification for appointment to the Faculty was, clearly, scholarly accomplishment. The overwhelming majority of Seminary instructors, from Schechter's presidency on, never served as congregational rabbis.²² It was assumed that, at least, the full-time Faculty of the Rabbinical School would be "observant" Jews in some vague, undefined sense, but, in the spirit of Western academia, the school steadfastly avoided any overt intrusion into the private lives of its instructors.

But academic excellence and professional skills alone do not make a rabbi. Above all, the rabbi is to serve as the pre-eminent model of a "religious" Jew, a Jew who fashions his life in terms of a distinctive perspective on the world and human experience as a whole.²³ But how

21. From among the wealth of scholarly publications, it is worth citing, as illustrative of the *Wissenschaft* style of Seminary scholarship, Louis Finkelstein's *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith*, 3rd edition with Supplement (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962); and the dean of Seminary talmudists after the death of Louis Ginzberg, the late Saul Lieberman's papers collected in his *Hellenism and Jewish Palestine* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), if only because these two men, above all, represented the more *halakhically* traditionalist pole among Seminary Faculty.

22. The most notable exceptions were Mordecai Kaplan, Max Arzt and, somewhat later, Moshe Zucker, together with, still fortunately among us, Simon Greenberg and Robert Gordis. Louis Finkelstein, who taught in the Seminary from 1920 and became its President, and then Chancellor from 1940 to 1972 when he became Chancellor Emeritus, did serve as Rabbi of Congregation Kehillath Israel in New York City from 1919 to 1930.

23. To be more technical, as a definition of religion, I use the proposal of Clifford Geertz in his "Religion as a Cultural System," in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 90: "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men, by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

does a Western graduate school, committed to *Wissenschaft* methods of scholarship, do *religious* education? More to the point, how can religious education take place in an implicitly secularized educational culture? And what authority can the religious tradition retain if it is subjected to the relativism implied by the appeal to history?

Of course, the traditional *yeshivot* were spared this bewilderment. In those circles, Torah—both Written and Oral—was directly revealed, verbally or propositionally, to Moses at Sinai. It contains God's final and exclusive word for Israel on all matters of belief and practice. The study of this literature is, then, itself an act of worship. Its goal is to uncover God's will for the infinite details of human life. This entire body of teaching, from antiquity to the present day, retains a singular integrity, unaffected by historical, cultural, sociological or economic considerations. It represents one internally coherent and consistent universe of discourse. In these circles, it is clear what constitutes a "religious" Jew, and, hence, the goal of the entire enterprise. It is nothing less than to create a Jew who is committed, throughout his life experience, to fulfilling God's will as embodied in this sacred tradition. And the rabbi who emerges from this educational experience is expected to persuade his congregants to do the same.

In these circles, then, the academic and religious dimensions of the enterprise coincide. The academic program *is* the instrument of religious education. Its assumptions are shared by both teachers and students. The enterprise, as a whole, is endowed with singular religious meaning.

But at the Seminary, in contrast, the nexus between the academic and religious stance of the school was irreparably split. It is difficult to discern, in retrospect, whether the Seminary's Faculties were aware of the dilemma, or how they handled the issue in their personal lives. If they did, it was never communicated to their students in class.²⁴ Their teaching style was detached and objective; issues of belief and existential meaning were studiously avoided. Courses in theology focused on the theology of the Talmudic rabbis, in philosophy, on Saadia, Halevi

24. To be fair, the issues were addressed on the rhetorical level. Seminary lore preserves an exchange that took place when Schechter interviewed Louis Finkelstein upon the latter's application for admission to the Rabbinical School. To Schechter's question "Why do you want to study at the Seminary?," Finkelstein is reported to have answered, "To study the great books of Judaism." Schechter's response: "To study books, all you need is a library. The only reason to come to the Seminary is to associate with great men!" Finkelstein clearly believed that the association with great role models would provide an experience in religious education, and it probably does, but that hardly constitutes a curricular conception. The same Seminary lore preserves the testimony of students and faculty that hearing Louis Ginzberg serve as *shaliach zibbur* in the Seminary synagogue at the *ne'ilah* service on *Yom Kippur* was an extraordinarily moving experience. This writer entered the Seminary after Ginzberg's death, but I can testify that the experience of hearing Louis Finkelstein serve in that same capacity during the *selihot* service was, indeed, striking.

or Maimonides. Texts were taught simply because they were there. Whatever relevance the particular text might have to the life situation of the instructor, the rabbinical student or his congregants-to-be, was left for the student to unravel.

To compound this ambivalence, on *halakhic* issues, the official stance of the school was consciously traditionalist, doubtless as a result of the influence of the Seminary's Talmud Faculty which determined the religious stance of the school as a whole. In the Seminary synagogue, for example, until 1983 when women were admitted for ordination, men and women sat separately.²⁵ The wide-ranging body of responsa which have become identified with the Conservative approach to contemporary *halakhic* questions—on issues such as driving to the synagogue on *shabbat*, the use of electricity on *shabbat*, the marriage of a *kohen* to a convert or a divorcee, and the early struggles with the issues posed by Jewish feminism—were initiated, produced and implemented by the rabbis of the Movement through their Committee on Law and Standards, and were usually met with indifference, if not disdain, by Seminary talmudists. Conservative liturgical publications—notably the *Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook*, published by the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue (1946), and omnipresent in Conservative synagogues until the recent (1985) publication of *Siddur Sim Shalom*, and which served as a singular source of unity among Conservative congregations—were never (again until 1983) used in the Seminary synagogue. This package of a critical mind-set combined with *halakhic* traditionalism seemed to pose no problem to Seminary Faculty, but, for their students, it was a source of constant frustration.

Again, the only way that this mixed message could be sustained was by studiously avoiding modern theological inquiry within the curriculum itself. For it was the modern theological agenda which would force the school to confront the status of Torah. Was it a cultural document, to be studied like any other cultural document? But then, why was its *halakhah* binding, and what religious meaning did these texts retain? Or was it, as Samson Raphael Hirsch insisted, the explicit word of God, eternally binding on matters of belief and practice, and imbued with religious meaning for all time? But, then, how could it be studied scientifically, like any other cultural tradition? Or was it, somehow, both of these? But, then, a theology of revelation would have to be expounded which would accomodate these apparently conflicting impulses. These questions were never explicitly addressed.

They *were* addressed, from the outset, by Mordecai Kaplan, who taught at the Seminary from 1909 to 1962 and exerted an overwhelm-

25. As of that date, two separate but parallel services were established, one in the traditional Seminary style, and the other in the style that has come to be called "traditional-egalitarian." This second service first adopted the *Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook*, and now uses *Siddur Sim Shalom*.

ing influence on the shape of Conservative Judaism as it emerged “in the field” away from the Seminary. Kaplan’s religious naturalism, which led to his reconceptualization of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization, provided him with a framework whereby theology, ideology and program achieved a singular religious integrity. But within the confines of the Seminary Faculty, Kaplan’s theological assumptions were simply unacceptable. The irony is that it was the Seminary’s very *wissenschaftlich* commitment to academic freedom on the Western, academic model, that affirmed Kaplan’s right to teach his material unchallenged, despite the opposition of the Seminary establishment. Kaplan’s influence on generations of Seminary trained rabbinical students, then, is fully understandable.²⁶ He alone was doing religious, rabbinic education. Some bought the entire package; most, bits and pieces of it, eclectically.

Kaplan’s influence on the Seminary student body began to wane in the years following World War II, but for some of us who entered the Seminary from the fifties on, Kaplan’s role as religious/theological mentor was assumed by the late Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel’s influence on Seminary culture was more problematic. He taught there from 1946 until his death in 1972 and he was, undoubtedly, one of the major figures in the American Jewish community, and, indeed, in American religion, from the fifties until his death. However, at the Seminary, his formal teaching in the Rabbinical School was limited to two, one-semester, required courses in Medieval Jewish Philosophy, doubtless because the discipline of philosophy itself simply did not rank high enough in the hierarchy of Seminary scholarly interests. (In his prime, Kaplan taught courses in Homiletics, “Philosophies of Judaism” and Midrash, all of them required for different groups of students at different times.) Heschel did, however, teach an elective “seminar,” in which the full range of modern theological issues that he covered in his writings, was addressed. This seminar attracted only a small and self-selected group of students, but its impact on them was extremely powerful. For various reasons, however, Heschel’s energies were soon directed to the broader range of social and political issues raging in the country at large, and thus, his impact on both school and Movement was necessarily attenuated.²⁷

26. On Kaplan’s influence on the shape of Conservative Judaism, see my “Mordecai Kaplan and the Ideology of Conservative Judaism,” *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1984, pp. 57–68. Generations of Seminary rabbinical students who studied Homiletics with Kaplan continue to testify to the impact of the encounter which far surpassed the boundaries of a Homiletics course. To be fair, there were other members of the Faculty—the late Shalom Spiegel and Moshe Zucker, in particular—who clearly felt the urgency of these religious issues and did address them in an often striking, though less systematic, way than did Kaplan.

27. One of Heschel’s students on the Faculty, however, the late Seymour Siegel, was

Apart from Kaplan and Heschel, however, there was no alternative model. Thus, the intractable dilemma of the Conservative Rabbi. His role demanded that he function as a religious model, operating *within* a system of religious beliefs and practices. But his education trained him to remain an *outsider*, contemplating the system with detached objectivity. Terms such as “God,” “soul,” and “spiritual” were expected to flow comfortably from his lips, but what did these terms mean to him? He was expected to recite a *Mi sheberakh* for the sick and an *El maleh* for the dead, but how did he understand the claim that God cures the ill and treasures the souls of the dead? He was expected to preach the observance of *shabbat* and *kashrut*, but why were they to be observed? In what sense did they represent God’s will for Israel? What is a *mizvah*, if there is no explicit *mezaveh*? And why were some rituals dropped but others reaffirmed? Why can we now drive on the *shabbat*, but oysters are still *treif*? How were these subtle distinctions to be negotiated by the layperson? Finally, the rabbi urged his congregants to attend the synagogue and pray on a regular basis, but what was prayer supposed to accomplish? Did God hear their prayers?

More important, officiating at a funeral or at a wedding is much more than saying the right words and performing the correct rituals. These are occasions when the rabbi should address the existential issues of living—mortality, suffering, sexuality, guilt, intimacy, love—in short, the range of issues which deal with the ultimate meaning of human life-experience. But what did Jewish religion have to say on all of these issues? How could ancient texts be understood to address the unique dimensions that these issues assumed, given the conditions of modernity? Indeed, what was specifically “religious” about Judaism as it was taught in Seminary class-rooms? In short, how could a secularized educational culture do the work of religious education?

To put the issue in another idiom, the Conservative rabbi’s education was an experience of “breaking the myth.” By “myth,” here, I mean not a fiction, of course, but, rather, an imaginative, global structure which a community discovers (not invents) to underlie all of reality, and which lends meaning to its experience of history and nature. A myth is “broken” when it is exposed as precisely a myth, not an objective picture of reality. When this happens, we may react in several different ways. We may return to a pre-critical literalism, shut our eyes and ears, reject the critical stance, and reaffirm the tradition as literally and objectively true. Alternatively, we can concede that the broken myth has, in fact, “died,” has lost its power to explain, to move

successful in introducing a good deal of modern theology (and of Heschel’s own thought) into his courses in Theology and Talmud in the fifties and sixties. The same can be said for Fritz Rothschild, who taught Jewish Philosophy in the sixties, seventies and eighties, and remains the most sensitive expositor of Heschel’s thought.

and motivate us, and it can now be dismissed as the fiction that it always was.²⁸

But neither of these reactions is necessary. A third alternative is to reaffirm the myth as “living” despite its state of being “broken,” that is, precisely to affirm its mythic qualities, welcome its poetic and dramatic richness, recognize that the alternative is never myth or no myth but, rather, *which* myth, and re-enter the mythic system in a state of “second” or “willed naivete.”²⁹

For, of course, *Wissenschaft's* vaunted search for objective detachment is simply unattainable by any human being. History, human experience, the natural world, in themselves, are mute; they have to be “read,” and, to read them, we require some syntax, some structure of meaning with which we determine even what constitutes the data, what is a “fact” in the first place, let alone how these facts cohere into meaning-laden patterns. There is simply no escaping the structuring which we humans impose on our experience. The issue, then, is never structure or no structure, but which one. The historiography of the *Wissenschaft* scholar is as much an interpretation of the data as that of the traditional believer. What we can hope to achieve, however, is a measure of self-awareness about the structures that are available to us and, then, consciously elect the structure which we choose to use.

The Conservative rabbi was never helped to negotiate this transition. The large majority could not return to a pre-critical, literalist position. Most Seminary students had lost their religious innocence before applying for admission; that is precisely what drew them to the Seminary in the first place. Some simply allowed the myth to die and never entered the congregational rabbinate. Many of these men subsequently populated the departments of Jewish Studies that flowered in American universities after the war. Indeed, many of these had come to the Seminary in the first place, simply because, until the fifties, it was the only

28. The literature on the nature and function of myths is extensive and growing rapidly. This discussion is based on Paul Tillich's seminal statement in his *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957). Some of the confusion surrounding the problem of defining the term is suggested in Will Herberg's "Some Variant Meanings of the Word 'Myth'" in his *Faith Enacted as History: Essays in Biblical Theology*, edited by Bernhard W. Anderson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976). A valuable anthology of scholarly approaches to the issue is *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*, Alan Dundes, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Finally, at this writing, the term has acquired new and popular relevance through the work of the late Joseph Campbell, particularly through his groundbreaking televised conversations with Bill Moyers. They are reproduced in *The Power of Myth*, Betty Sue Flower, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

29. The process of going beyond the critical stage of myth-breaking and reaffirming the myth, precisely as myth, is discussed in detail in James W. Fowler's *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), particularly pp. 184–195. The phrase “second naivete” is Paul Ricoeur's (pp. 187–188).

school in America where they could do serious graduate-level scholarship in Judaica. They had never planned to become rabbis.

But the large majority of rabbinical students remained caught in the dilemma. They never succeeded in integrating the intellectual and existential dimensions of their being. As a result, they vacillated from one response to another, moving from outside of the mythic system, into it, and then back out, at what cost to their sense of personal integrity we can only surmise. For, paradoxically, the rabbi's role demanded that the Jewish religious myth be very much alive, however broken it may have become for him.

Or, to return to Yerushalmi's terminology, what had "died" was the Jewish "collective memory"—". . . that common network of belief and praxis, through whose mechanisms . . . the past was once made present."³⁰ That was the ultimate impact of *Wissenschaft*, the price that had to be paid for our predecessors' accommodation with modernity.

But the dilemma of the rabbi simply reflected the dilemma of the school which had trained him. The Seminary never confronted its own ambivalence: was it to be a great, Western academic institution or the fountainhead of a modern, American religious movement? It claimed to be both, but, in reality, for most of its first century, it served magnificently as the first. And it largely ignored the second.

We should not, in any way, minimize the extent of the Seminary's accomplishment. It provided an extraordinarily exhilarating intellectual environment. Rarely before, and never since, did one academy encompass just about all of the masters of one scholarly discipline within its own walls. It can take credit, almost single-handedly, for the transmission of the tradition of Jewish scholarship from Europe to America. In fact, through its graduates and, later, their students, it succeeded in accomplishing one of the original goals of the European *Wissenschaft* school, the introduction of the study of Judaica into the American academic agenda and into American university curricula. A striking symbol of that achievement was the decision of Harvard University, on the occasion of its tercentenary in 1936, to award an honorary degree to the then dean of Seminary talmudists, Louis Ginzberg. A talmudist? At Harvard? Jewish studies had, indeed, arrived!

But what, then, of the movement that we identify as Conservative Judaism? To the extent that it came to be identified with a distinctive congregational style—the suburban "cathedral" synagogue, mixed seating, a largely passive audience-like congregation sitting below the *bimah*, the late Friday night service, in some instances, an organ, the triennial cycle, but also *kippot*, *talitot*, and a largely traditional liturgy sprinkled with the odd English reading—the Movement was created not by the Seminary but by a coalition of Seminary rabbis and their lay constitu-

30. Yerushalmi, *Op. cit.*, p. 94.

ency. At best, the Seminary treated the Movement with careful detachment. It may well have provided the local congregation with its rabbi, its cantor, and some of its teachers, but it was perceived, quite accurately, as being very remote, not only geographically but also religiously. In fact, the twin pillars of Seminary culture, its scholarly richness and its *halakhic* traditionalism, provided little with which the average Conservative congregant could possibly identify.

And, *mutatis mutandi*, since the lay community was neither scholarly nor traditionalist, it was never allowed to exert any serious influence on the shaping of the Movement. In short, the Seminary created precisely the lay community that it wanted, and then proceeded to infantilize it for being that way. Beginnings are important. Contrast the respective roles of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the United Synagogue of America in American Reform and Conservative Judaism. In Reform, the lay movement created the school; in Conservative Judaism, the school created the movement. It is striking, for example, that when the Commission on the Philosophy of Conservative Judaism (which eventually produced *Emet Ve-Emunah*) was originally appointed, it was to be composed exclusively of Seminary and University of Judaism Faculty and members of the Rabbinical Assembly. Only later, following the protests of some members of the Commission, were lay people invited to join in the enterprise. Hence the elitist/clerical character of the Movement.

The paradox is that the Movement flowered throughout the first half of the century, largely because it was in tune with the sociological currents of early twentieth-century American Jewry, because it was served by an extraordinarily competent group of rabbis and lay leaders, and, to be candid, because it made minimalist religious/*halakhic* demands on its congregants.

For the mixed message which Conservative rabbis imbibed during their Seminary experience could not but be transmitted to their laity. It is no wonder, then, that the Movement is perceived as having failed to create a religiously committed laity. It remained an elitist, clerically-led reading of Judaism, or, as popularly repeated, "an Orthodox Faculty teaching Conservative rabbis to minister to Reform Jews." What emerged, consciously or not, was a compartmentalization of the congregation's Jewish religious experience which, in turn, reflected the fragmentation of their rabbi's training. Rabbi and congregant reached an implicit accommodation that confined Jewish religion to the walls of the synagogue, to the late Friday night service, the High Holidays, some Festivals, and the rites of passage. The responsibility for the Jewish education of their children would be assumed by the six-hour-a-week synagogue school. What the congregant did outside the synagogue, at home, and during the week was largely his own affair.

A number of factors combined to bring these issues, long ignored,

into the open. First, in 1970, the Seminary established its own graduate school offering M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Judaica. It was then free to ask: what distinguishes rabbinic education from graduate education in Judaica? The Seminary was a small school, instructors were asked to teach in both schools, and individual courses were populated by both graduate (generally “non-religious” or at least “non-observant,” and, at times, even non-Jewish) students and rabbinical students together. A host of new questions now arose. For example: What criteria are to be used for the hiring of faculty? Is scholarly competence sufficient? Are the instructor’s personal religious commitments to be considered? And how are these to be measured?

But, above all, the school could now question its implicit model of the rabbinate. It had to ask: What should a Conservative Rabbi be in late twentieth-century America? How *does* he or she function? How *should* he or she function? And what kind of training does he or she need to function effectively and with a modicum of satisfaction? In short, how does one shape a curriculum to balance both the needs of the discipline as perceived by the men and women in the field and the vision of the faculty?

For, second, the needs of the discipline had changed, as the community had changed. Rabbis were no longer preaching to first generation American Jews, largely of the middle, or lower middle socio-economic class, most of them business men and housewives, but, rather, to their children and grandchildren, almost all college educated, many of them professionals or academicians at the top of their fields. They took it for granted that the rabbi was the master of his discipline just as they were masters of theirs.

But they also brought with them a distinctively late twentieth-century agenda: a marriage on the brink of dissolution, a fragmented family, alienated children, intermarriage, the drug culture, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, the feminist revolution, AIDS, suicide, a sense of emptiness and anomie despite apparent status, success and wealth, loneliness and the need for intimacy, and the rest. How was the rabbi to address these issues? What resources were there in Jewish religion to help address them? And how could the rabbi be trained to address them?

Thus, third, the persistent and growing dissatisfaction of Seminary alumni with the nature of their training for the American congregational rabbinate could no longer be avoided. It would not be enough to assign more curricular time to courses in professional skills, or to move these courses closer to the center of the curriculum. What was demanded, rather, was nothing less than a paradigm change, a serious reconceptualization of the reigning model of a Seminary-trained rabbi. Further, this reconceptualization would have to be accomplished without sacrificing either of the Seminary’s classical academic commitments:

to the scholarly competence of its graduates, and to its critical/historical approach to Judaism. Not only would the school never abide such a traumatic dislocation, there was also the matter of the intellectual integrity of students and Faculty alike.

Finally, this paradigm change was within reach because a new Faculty—American born and educated—gradually emerged to replace the Faculties of the first seven decades of Seminary history. These men and, now, women as well, may well have been trained in the *Wissenschaft* model of Jewish scholarship, but, to them, *Wissenschaft* was simply a scholarly methodology, not an ideology.

Further, some of these men and women were eager to address the issue of the distinctiveness of rabbinic, as opposed to graduate school, education. They did not feel the need to cling, throughout, to a classroom stance of scholarly detachment. They were prepared to put themselves into their subject-matter and to turn some of their classes into an arena in which issues of religious meaning could be explored without sacrificing academic quality.

They could do all of this, partially because they had worked out the integration in their own lives, but also because they were the beneficiaries of a new scholarly interest in the phenomenon of religion, itself, as part of the broad discipline of humanistic studies. A literature of considerable scholarly merit, dealing with issues such as the phenomenology of religion, comparative religion, the functions of liturgy and ritual, the nature and function of religious and theological myths, and the impact of psychology, sociology and anthropology on religious thinking and behavior was now available. And, even more helpful, it became clear that the problem of getting beyond the critical/historical approach to religion was not endemic to Judaism alone, that other religious traditions had encountered the same issue, and that a significant body of literature dealing with this problem specifically was now at hand.

In fact, one of the more fascinating issues on the agenda of this new scholarship (and an intriguing counterpoint to the classical confrontational stance between science and religion) was the realization that, in their ultimate reach, science and religion are not that far apart, neither in their goals nor in their resources. Both were now perceived as attempting to discover ultimate structures of meaning in the world by coming into touch with dimensions of reality that elude direct human perception, and, to do this, both must invoke the use of—here, the language varies—metaphors, models, myths, constructs or symbols.³¹

Finally, the very nature of this inquiry compelled both instructor and rabbinical student to confront, head-on, the central and pervasive issues of modern Jewish philosophy and theology: the nature of reve-

31. From the wealth of scholarly literature on this topic, see, in particular, Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

lation, the authority of Torah, the status of *mizvah*, the distinctive character of religious and/or theological language, the status of religious knowledge, theodicy, eschatology, and the rest.

All of these issues are at the heart of the Seminary agenda at the present time. A new Rabbinical School curriculum, three years in the making, will begin to be implemented with the academic year 1989–90. The core of this new curriculum is a four-hour-a-week seminar, beginning with the very first year of rabbinic education, which will provide an arena in which the student can work on his or her personal theological/religious/*halakhic* stance and develop the idiom to transmit that position to others. It also demands much more intensive internship experience, much earlier in rabbinic training than in the past. Whether or not it represents a total paradigm change remains to be seen. Every curriculum is a political document, and there is usually a considerable gap between the curriculum as it exists on paper and what is actually taught in the classroom. But, at least, the questions are being addressed.

It is also clear that, in the process, the Seminary is now prepared to become the fountainhead of Conservative Judaism in fact and not only in rhetoric. In retrospect, the issue of the ordination of women looms as an even greater watershed than originally perceived, a watershed not only for the school but for the Movement as a whole. For the first time in its history, the Seminary itself—most notably its Chancellor, Gerson Cohen³²—and not only the Conservative rabbinate, *responded* to a clear call for direction from the Movement on a significant religious/*halakhic* issue. In so doing, the Seminary broke with two hallowed pillars of its classical culture, *at the same time*: its *halakhic* traditionalism and its conscientiously cultivated stance of detachment from what was going in the congregational movement. No wonder the agony!

But, in responding the way it did, whatever the ensuing agony, the Seminary finally brought its scholarly assumptions, its *halakhic* posture and its implicit theological stance into line. In the process, it also spoke directly to a major religious crisis confronting just about every Jew in the country.

It is possible, then, that an inquiry, begun over a century-and-a-half ago, has finally reached its resolution.

32. The story of the struggle over the issue of ordaining women at the Seminary remains to be written. However, there is no questioning the absolutely decisive influence of Chancellor Cohen's courageous leadership in favor of the move. Other factors played a role—for example, the decline in the influence on the school of the more traditionalist wing of the Talmud Department, the changing shape of the Faculty, the pressure from the other wings of the Movement, pre-eminently the Rabbinical Assembly, and, indeed, the momentum of the feminist revolution in the country at large—but, without the Chancellor's personal intervention, none of these factors would have been sufficient in and of themselves.

A Reconstructionist Perspective on the Enlightenment and the Emancipation

JACOB J. STAUB

TWO CENTURIES MAY APPEAR TO BE A lengthy period. We would do well to recall, however, that, even in an age of future shock, it is often not enough time for the dust to clear. Two hundred years after the Enlightenment and the Emancipation, Jews find themselves grappling with the same issues that have confronted our forebears since the latter part of the eighteenth century. We have yet to determine the optimal form for Jewish life after the demise of the pre-modern, segregated, autonomous Jewish community. We have no clear view of whether the Enlightenment value of autonomy can somehow be organically integrated into a Jewish way of life that has for so long been so heteronomous, and, if not, whether a system of commandments can be maintained in the absence of a community that enforces it.

Having reached no consensus about the optimal response to the challenges of modernity, we should not be surprised to find that our analyses of its impact upon Judaism diverge substantially as they reflect our respective agendas. In what follows, I propose a) to reflect upon the nature of Jewish responses to modernity from the Reconstructionist perspective of the ongoing evolution of Jewish civilization, and b) to reflect upon the evolution of specifically Reconstructionist responses in this century.

The Ambivalence of Jews

While it is appropriate to discuss the impact of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation on Judaism on the anniversary of the French Revolution, doing so is *also* problematical—in interesting and revealing ways. That is, 1789 was *not* an important year for Jews. Only in 1791—fully two years later—did the French National Assembly proclaim the political Emancipation of the Jewish people. It was not initially obvious to the Assembly that the Declaration of the Rights of Man should apply to the Jews of France, that Jews were people like all others, subject to the same responsibilities and entitled to the same rights. The Enlight-

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enment debate about the humanity of Jews and, thus, about the Jewish part in the new polity was not laid to rest in 1789 or even 1791.

But we cannot, in good faith, accentuate exclusively the reticence of Enlightenment thinkers and Emancipation leaders to include Jews in their revolutionary vision. The reticence was mutual; Jews were not prepared to accept the “gift” of Emancipation with unbridled enthusiasm, and not only because it was a grudging and conditional gift that was to be granted and retracted repeatedly throughout Western and Central Europe over the course of the following century. Perhaps the clearest way to illustrate this is to recall the Napoleonic Sanhedrin (1806–1808), a fascinating spectacle that epitomizes Jewish ambivalence about Emancipation, then *and* now.

How ought the Jewish leaders assembled by Napoleon to have responded to the Emperor’s questions? Even today, with the benefits of hindsight and 200 years of Jewish experience of political emancipation, most of us do not envy them their predicament and opportunity. Yes, Jews are capable of obeying civil law and participating fully in the political process, of paying taxes and integrating into the economy. But should they have been enthusiastic about summarily dispensing with the autonomous self-government and the communal separation that had served for so long as the matter that had nourished the Jewish spirit? Had each of us been called to that Sanhedrin, aware as we now are of the effects of citizenship in the modern nation upon traditional Jewish life, would we have been more, or less, equivocal about our willingness to agree to economic and social integration?

Of course, as a Jewishly unauthorized and powerless group confronted with the questions (and the armies) of the most powerful European leader of the day, the 1806 Sanhedrin had few choices. Prudence demanded equivocation; it would have done no one any good for them to have stood fast to principles against the tidal waves of history.

In other words, the Jews of the Napoleonic Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century—like other Jews through history—found themselves forced to respond to challenges that were not of their choosing. While different groups of Jews have embraced the consequences of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation with varying degrees of enthusiasm, none of us has been able to avoid those consequences.

All of this is noteworthy by way of introduction because it is somewhat misleading to recount the tale of modern Jewish history, as is sometimes done, as a process in which European Jewry first naively embraced, almost messianically, the promise of full and equal integration, only later to come to the rude awakening that political emancipation contained within it the seeds of communal, spiritual, and even physical danger for Jews. That interpretation, which serves the Zionist historiographical agenda among others, portrays the gamut of early Jewish responses to Emancipation as a set of wrongheaded, misguided

programs that could, and should, have somehow avoided an enthusiastic embrace of modernity. Typically set against them, in this portrait, are later developments: the birth of Zionism out of the insight that, in an era of nationalism, the Jewish people requires its own nation-state, both for the development of healthy normalization and for reasons of security; the fortification of twentieth-century modern Orthodoxy which, in contrast to earlier, more accommodationist Orthodox programs, such as that of S. R. Hirsh, tends boldly to reject the necessity for acceding to the subversion of halakhah and traditional belief by the tenets of Enlightenment ideology; and the latter day embrace by liberal Judaism of ritual forms and communal ideals that were once abandoned as obstructions to full social integration.

The facts, however, present a far less clear and far less edifying picture. It is certainly the case that many individual Jews abandoned, and continue to abandon, their Jewish heritage for the promises and rewards of full integration. A close examination of even the earliest responses of the modern Jewish movements, however, reveals that most were acutely aware of the perils of modernity for Jewish survival. Thus, what appears to us in hindsight and at first glance to be a virtual surrender to contemporary influences can just as easily be viewed as courageous attempts to adapt boldly and creatively to radically new conditions threatening the Jewish community.

Similarly, while there is no doubt that, after the Holocaust, and with the establishment of the State of Israel, we all tend to be far more wary of the promises of modernity and far more willing publicly to assert Jewish distinctiveness and Jewish interests, we seem today collectively to be no more certain about the most effective way to respond to the ongoing effects of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation. We don't yet know if the Jewish heritage can be meaningfully transmitted over many generations in the context of Western democracy. We can't predict whether apparently benign political situations for Jews lead inexorably to our persecution. We still have no idea if the establishment of a Jewish state can produce a vital, new *Jewish* synthesis and can stand effectively against ongoing threats to Jewish survival.

It is thus worth stating what ought to be obvious: The fate of the Jewish people in the Western world over the last two centuries ought not to be understood as a moral allegory in which we have succeeded or failed according to the loyalty and tenacity with which we have held fast to Judaism. It is more profitably and accurately to be regarded as the opening acts of a new and unprecedented saga in our history in which, confronted with the necessity of adapting to a radically new political status, we have energetically set ourselves to exploring a variety of strategies through which Jewish traditions can remain vital. At some points, we have held to past precedent too long and tightly for our own good; at others, we have been too quick and eager to embrace what is

new. Both tendencies should be viewed in the same context—that of Jews exercising their best judgment about the most appropriate response to the unprecedented.

If we are wiser now than were our forebears 200 years ago, it is because we can now see how complex the issues really are. We cannot control or eliminate anti-Semitism by integrating, individually or collectively. We cannot refashion Judaism according to contemporary ideas and values without losing much of what is compelling in our traditions. We cannot pretend to ignore contemporary currents unless we are prepared blatantly to disregard the effects of modernity upon us whether we like it or not. We can afford to assume neither that what is new is best nor that what is new can be disregarded. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jews thought that a clear resolution was at hand. We know better. Those of us who are still committed with all of our hearts to the Judaism of the future know that we are in this for the long haul.

Some of us feel guided in our efforts by the hand of divine providence. Others, myself included, are less certain that the future—in a century, in a millennium—holds an outcome that we can, given our limited perspective, regard as positive. There are too many unanswerable questions:

What will the Judaism of the future look like? Can the tides of assimilation in North America be stemmed? Can we absorb the intense interest and energy of so many Jews by choice? Will the women's movement transform the shape of Jewish communities, making them more inclusive, more democratic? Will the influences of contemporary Western thought and versions of Eastern spirituality yield a richer, more compelling approach to Judaism that avoids the aridity of earlier rationalism and scientism? Can the initial dedication of modern Jews to social justice remain a central component of Jewish identity in communities where Jews are established as part of the upper middle class? Can Jewish civilization really flourish when most of us are so Hebraically illiterate, when few of us live in Jewish communities? Is the chasm developing between different Jewish streams just one more episode in the ongoing dialectic of Jewish history, or has the liberty of Emancipation provided us with an unprecedented opportunity to split the Jewish people as we have never been split before?

And in Israel: Is it realistic to hope that the polarization between *dati'im* and *hiloni'im* will one day be bridged through the development of a new, uniquely Israeli version of Jewish living? Will the pressure brought by unremitting conflict transform Israeli Jews into a garrison people beyond recognition? Will the Zionist goal of normalization, of the cessation of anti-Semitism, ever again look like more than a pipe-dream? Will the unique experiences of Israeli Jews accelerate their current drift away from diaspora Jews?

Those who do not discern a guiding divine hand that guarantees the outcome of our historical odyssey (and some who do) have, instead, to take comfort in identifying with the midrashic Moses, seated in the back of Akiba's classroom, unable to recognize what has become of the tradition that he originated. It is no coincidence that this midrash emerges from rabbis who themselves were engaged in responding to the destruction of the Temple by refashioning Judaism to meet the sweeping challenges of *their* era. If we, in the modern period, have faced an unprecedented set of circumstances, we should recall that it is not unprecedented for Jews to face the unprecedented. It took far more than 200 years for rabbinic Judaism to emerge into the predominant, all-encompassing way of life that so many of us now think of as having been fixed for all time. Moreover, the rabbis' victory was in no small measure due to a confluence of external circumstances in which non-Jewish authorities invested rabbis with the power to govern. As none of us has privileged access to the ways that the Jewish people will be buffeted by events in the future, we have no choice but to respond according to our best judgments and highest principles, cultivating patience and modesty as essential virtues.

Reconstructionist Responses: Community

Beginning with Mordecai Kaplan, Reconstructionists have insisted that no post-Emancipation interpretation of Judaism can be adequate unless it takes into account the bald fact that we no longer live in autonomously governed communities in which Jewish culture permeates the air we breathe, and in which the law of the community is Jewish law. When Kaplan began to write, in the 1920s, this fact had not been adequately acknowledged by the modern Jewish movements. The halakhic movements continued to affirm the binding nature of halakhah to a mass of Jews who, because of political emancipation and the dissolution of traditional Jewish communities, no longer responded to halakhic imperatives.

Reform, on the other hand, had sought to adjust to the loss of community by redefining Judaism as a religion of ethical monotheism, discarding most ritual and community-based observances in a quest to assert that Jews could be as much a part of their societies as anyone else, that continuing Jewish identification need not be a source of parochialism, a cause of self-segregation. Kaplan viewed this approach as fatally flawed because, in transforming Judaism into a catechism of belief and ethical commitments, it neglected a basic sociological reality: that beliefs and values are not acquired by instruction in a cultural vacuum. Communities transmit beliefs and values through a process of acculturation that requires the existence of a community with norms, rituals, culture and all of the other factors that shape the world view of the community members.

Influenced by sociologists like Durkheim, Kaplan sought to address this need by defining Judaism as a civilization, and by insisting that a vital version of Judaism in the modern world requires that Jews reject the temptation to define Judaism more narrowly, on the Protestant model, as a religion. Along this line, he affirmed the essential roles of ritual observance, Hebrew language, and Torah study in the acculturation process, and he proposed and led in the development of Jewish community centers where North American Jews would meet and form bonds on the basis of the whole gamut of social and cultural activities.

Kaplan's ultimate vision of an adequate response to political emancipation, however, transcended these partial proposals. He envisioned the formation of an "organic Jewish community"—modeled largely, it seems, on the Polish and Lithuanian Councils. The organic Jewish community would serve as the corporate structure that is otherwise lacking in the voluntaristic situation of Western democracies. Membership in the organic community would, of necessity, be voluntary, but it would require payment of dues, and would constitute a monopoly on Jewish services—worship, education, the sale of kosher meat, life cycle events from circumcision to burial. Thus, any Jew wishing to identify Jewishly and to participate in Jewish communal life would have little choice but to join and thus be subject to the rules and standards of the organization.

To be sure, Kaplan had no illusion that modern Western Jewry could be transformed into a monolithic body. His hope was, rather, that a "unity in diversity" could be established, in which all Jewish factions would agree to form such an organic community while disagreeing about their interpretations of Jewish belief and practice; his image was of many different opportunities for worship services that would be available simultaneously in a single community center building. While his proposal was not designed to eradicate basic differences, it *was* intended to create a much broader consensus and basis for joint action than existed in his time or exists in ours. We might not agree on the status of women in Jewish ritual or on the words of our prayers, but we might agree on the necessity for devoting funds to Jewish education, or on pressuring community members to maintain certain ethical standards in their business or professional practices, or on what is a reasonable rate of profit for the manufacturers of kosher food. Moreover, the very existence of community centers and community councils, organized geographically rather than ideologically, would not only represent a major consolidation of resources; it would bring Jews of all stripes together under a single roof and would force all of us to interact like a real community out of which acculturation and a living communal culture would emerge.

Obviously, over the decades, this major part of Kaplan's program has found no takers—in part, because it requires a commitment to pluralism that is antithetical to the basic belief system of Orthodox Jews; in part, because it asks us to dispense with intensely felt institutional

loyalties; in part, because it would require of us a degree of rejection of voluntarism that is so ingrained in the world view of post-Emancipation Western Jews; in part, because enterprising, free-lance rabbis could break the monopoly at any point. Without the adoption of some such model, however, our predicament remains essentially the same as it was fifty years ago. There is still no substance to the term “Jewish community,” and we continue to scramble for ways to patch this gaping hole in all of our programs for the transmission of Jewish civilization from one generation to the next—day schools, family education programs, *havurot*, summer camping. All of these introduce a degree of intensity that is structurally lacking from the voluntarism that permeates our collective associations.

The Reconstructionist movement has had to confront the fact that no organic community has yet emerged or is likely to emerge in the foreseeable future. Without it, the movement has had to build more modest, less comprehensive, and less effective structures in order to move Jews closer to a Jewish way of life that emerges out of community. In the early 1960s, the movement pioneered in the development of *havurot*, attempts at avoiding the lack of communal feeling in larger synagogues by generating a sense of mutual obligation and commitment.

Reconstructionist synagogues have attempted to become “participatory communities”—communities in which communal decision-making is shared by all members who are willing to undertake the study of Jewish traditions. Rabbis do not serve as halakhic authorities but, rather, as teachers of tradition who encourage lay Jews to take responsibility for Jewish learning and deciding about communal practices and standards. The theory here is that, in the absence of a traditional community in which Jewish leaders have the authority and power to enforce their edicts, there is no point in issuing rulings that will not be observed. Instead, the more effective way to increase interest, observance, and commitment among Jews is to involve them organically in study and discussion about matters that affect them directly. By involving them in this way, they learn far more and are far more likely to be Jewishly transformed than when they are asked to accept passively decisions that are handed down from on high.

Reconstructionist synagogues have also pioneered in developing “support system networks,” in which members join various affinity groups and become involved in helping one another in a host of ways that replicate the way a traditional community once functioned—caring for the sick, connecting older members with younger ones, pooling areas of expertise for the benefit of all.

While these and other Reconstructionist innovations have been quite effective in involving Jews in satisfying, meaningful communal activities and, thus, in Judaizing their lives in ways that would not have otherwise occurred, they have not yet adequately addressed the basic social chal-

lenge, according to Kaplan, of the Emancipation—the creation of real communities, in which members are bound and thus shaped by communal lore and values. All of our so-called “communities” are now more accurately characterized, in Bellah’s term, as “lifestyle enclaves”—associations of people who come together voluntarily because of common interests, rather than as members of communities who feel an all-encompassing sense of mutual responsibility.

This is an area of continuing concern to Reconstructionists. While participatory decision making, *havvurot*, and support system networks succeed in providing much needed Jewish settings for people to reconnect with one another and to their heritage, the bottom line is that they remain involved only as long as their needs are met, as services that they want are provided to them. There is no institutional ground, therefore, for Jews to transcend their autonomy, to feel connected to, and worked upon, by a timeless heritage to which they are necessarily connected. And, as long as Jews join together only autonomously, the possibility for the organic transmission of the Jewish heritage remains weak.

The movements committed to halakhah seek to address this challenge by affirming the continuing obligatory nature of the *mizvot*. But Reconstructionists view halakhah as no more and no less than a system developed by human beings in response to historical circumstances in their quest to create a sacred way of life. Thus, for Reconstructionists, *mizvot* that do not concern moral obligations are not, by definition, obligatory, apart from the individual’s autonomous choice to take them on as commitments. Reconstructionists believe that the authority of halakhah has always derived from the functioning of Jewish communities in which it was the enforceable norm. In that light, any new sense of obligation, transcending autonomy, must also derive from a commitment, now autonomously undertaken, to a community.

For this reason, various Reconstructionist communities are exploring the possibility of collectively entered covenants, in which membership will clearly involve the responsibility to abide by the decisions of the group. This move reflects a growing sense that the Reconstructionist program cannot continue to ignore the centrality of organic community—that even for those who reject the authoritative claims of halakhah, the fullness of Jewish living requires an acceptance of the fact that the words of the living God are made manifest in the collective struggles of Jews to hear them and to embody them in their lives.

Reconstructionist Responses: Theology

As the Emancipation has confronted us with the central problem of the breakdown of traditional, self-governing communities, the Enlightenment has provided an ideological challenge to traditional Jewish

theology that is no less formidable. It has led quite dramatically to the questioning of the theocentric, otherworldly emphases of pre-modern Judaism.

Here, too, Kaplan did not shy away from noting that a broad reconstruction of basic Jewish beliefs about God, revelation, prophecy, creation, providence, theodicy, afterlife, and messiah was now required in order to prevent the wholesale defection of thinking, educated Jews. Such Jews could no longer remain committed to a belief system that had been constructed in an era whose terms of reference differed so markedly from our own. This he did through a systematic reinterpretation of all of the components of the traditional belief system, divesting them of supernaturalism and explaining how, at their core, they could function in a new key—as vehicles to human self-realization. He did so by remaining faithful to the hoary line of his predecessors, Jewish theologians in every era who have reinterpreted Judaism in the terms of their age.

For Reconstructionists, however, Kaplan's work in this area cannot, by definition, remain authoritative. To be true to the Kaplanian theological legacy is to *continue* to reinterpret according to the best insights of every generation. Kaplan thought and wrote at a time when Pragmatism was much more in vogue—before the full development of humanistic psychology, before the recent flowering of anthropological work on the nature of myth and ritual, before the reclamation of Jewish mysticism as a legitimate field of scientific inquiry, at a time when faith in scientific progress was far less ambivalent than it is today.

Accordingly, a new generation of Reconstructionists have, as a major priority, the reintroduction of spirituality into their transnaturalistic universe. They are no longer uncomfortable *davvening*, no longer averse to utilizing the traditional words of the liturgy and the traditional symbols of ritual observance, no longer shy about expressing social action concerns in traditional sacred language, because they understand the power of symbolic language even when the speaker is conscious of its human authorship and, hence, its relative and imprecise nature.

This development marks a further stage of the movement's response to the Enlightenment. It signals what is perhaps best viewed as a deepening maturity and sophistication in responding to what now seems like a less formidable and awesome challenge. Western culture itself, as well as the comfortable immersion in it of recent generations of Jews, now better understands the limitations of the Enlightenment viewpoint, the ways in which our earlier devotion to empirical analysis and our consequent aversion to the mythic and transcendent dimensions of reality were unnecessary and, ultimately, unscientific.

The final chapter on Jewish responses to the Emancipation and the Enlightenment has yet to be written. If one can dare to imagine the special issue of JUDAISM devoted to the 250th or 300th anniversary of

the French Revolution, it is a safe bet that Jews will not yet have measured the full consequences of the revolution of modernity for the Jewish people. We will, it is to be hoped, then, as now, continue to experiment with yet new communal and theological forms, never knowing which of our best efforts will be worthy to endure.

JEWISH SYMBOLS IN THE GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD

Erwin R. Goodenough

Edited, with a foreword, by Jacob Neusner

This volume presents to a new generation of readers the most important portions of Erwin Goodenough's classic thirteen-volume work, a magisterial attempt to encompass human spiritual history in general through the study of Jewish symbols in particular. Revealing that the Jewish religion of the period was much more varied and complex than the extant Talmudic literature would lead us to believe, Goodenough presented evidence for the existence of a Hellenistic-Jewish mystic mythology far closer to the Qabbalah than to rabbinical Judaism.

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Emancipation—The Challenge of Living in Two Worlds

W. GUNTHER PLAUT

THE BI-CENTENARY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION serves as a convenient point for a fresh look at the continuing challenge of Enlightenment. Its importance is unquestioned, for it marked the first massive breakdown of inherited political and, eventually, religious and cultural arrangements. It is well to remember, however, that the French Revolution neither began the process of Jewish emancipation nor did its advent assure or define its success.

That process had already begun, albeit in unstructured form, during the earlier part of the eighteenth century. What the Revolution and, especially, the Declaration of Human Rights, in 1792, did was to give it momentum and the aspect of irreversibility. (It would take the Nazis, 150 years later, to attempt a murderous and ultimately futile rewriting of this history.)

The three groups targeted by the Revolution were the third and fourth estates—the middle class and the bottom layer of society—and the Jews. But while the first merely aimed at political and economic integration, Jews had different needs: they wanted to be politically and economically integrated and yet have the privilege of being religiously and culturally separate. That would prove to be difficult, and that difficulty has not disappeared even today. In fact, the Jewish desire to live, so to speak, in two worlds at the same time is inherent in Diaspora living, and so are the problems that come with it. This, alone, will be the focus of our essay.

By definition, Jews who expect to remain in the Diaspora have (and had) two basic choices: they can cease to be Jews,¹ or they can make an effort to live both as full-fledged participants in their society and, at the same time, as practitioners of a separate way of life. There are those who believe that this choice is essentially flawed, and that it is not possible to live in two worlds without short-changing one or the other. Usu-

1. Formerly, this meant conversion to the majority faith (whether based on conviction or otherwise), but today it would usually be characterized by religious neglect, non-interest in Jewish learning of any kind, disaffiliation, mixed marriage, raising one's children as non-Jews, non-support of Jewish causes—in other words, total assimilation.

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ally, it will be the Jewish aspect which is diminished and which will, inevitably, be decreased and eventually end in total assimilation. This is the concept of *shelilat ha-golah*, which proclaims the essential impossibility of continuing a meaningful Jewish life outside of Israel.²

This essay will attempt to show how, in the aftermath of the Revolution, the “two-worlds” syndrome of Diaspora life was met in two different parts of the Jewish world, in Germany and North America. Thereafter, we will turn to an evaluation of present-day Diaspora Judaism in the light of these historical experiences.

1. *The German Foundation*

We look first at Germany,³ because it turned out that emancipation developed most rapidly there (and not in France as might have been expected) and brought in its train what we have come to know as the Reform movement. This development was not a function of the Gentile environment alone, but of the Jewish community as well.

A few sources provide us with some information about the condition of pre-emancipatory German Jewry. Among them are the travelogues of David Azulai and the responsa of Jacob Emden.⁴ There is, however, another source which hitherto has not been exploited sufficiently. It is a collection of sixty-odd small volumes of missionary reports that were rendered to a Protestant institute in Halle. The head of the institute was a Rev. Johann Heinrich Callenberg, who managed to send missionaries all across the countryside with the specific task of contacting Jews and acquainting them with the teachings of the Gospels. The emissaries wrote reports to the mother institution and Cal-

2. To be sure, there are those who choose to solve this dilemma by isolating themselves as much as possible from their environment, which they use only to earn a livelihood. Otherwise, they encapsulate themselves in a Jewish cocoon where, from childhood to the grave, they live and learn as they once did in the *shtetl*—and to emphasize this point will even dress in the old Polish garb which now assumes the role of a religious uniform. This small segment has achieved heightened importance through its political stature in Israel, but even in the Diaspora it has had its own growth factor. Many Orthodox Jews who otherwise belong to the so-called mainstream and are part of the two-world syndrome, are sending their children to *yeshivot* that belong to the “separatist” element, where learning is defined entirely in traditional, medieval terms. Yeshiva graduates of this kind will often serve as rabbis in mainstream Orthodox congregations and thereby move them to the right. Even so, say the proponents of the *shelilat ha-golah* concept, the pressure of the Gentile environment will eventually crack the walls of even the most isolated.

3. That is, at German speaking lands, because a Germany in the modern sense did not come into existence until 1870/71.

4. Azulai's *Sefer Ma'agol tov* appeared from 1753 to 1778; it was later edited by Aaron Freimann (Jerusalem, 1934). Emden's *She'lat Yavets*, first published 1738 to 1759, was re-issued in Lemberg in 1884. See also Boas Cohen, *Kuntres Ha-Teshuvot* (Budapest, 1930), and Herman Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648–1806)* (Cambridge, MA, 1971).

lenberg (and, later, his successors) published extracts from their letters in annual collections which cover some sixty years.⁵

The missionaries (whose names were not published, nor were the places about which they reported usually identified) visited larger cities as well as remote villages. The Jews spoke Judaeo-German among themselves, which enabled them to communicate more or less adequately with other Germans and, thus, with the missionaries.⁶ But, especially in cities, the missionaries found Jews who spoke German well and whose general education was surprisingly advanced. There were Jewish doctors and even an innkeeper acquainted with Latin; and in Bielefeld they found a family who spoke Hebrew, French and Italian, and elsewhere even met a Jew who knew Greek. Increasingly, Jewish children were sent to German elementary schools, although not all schools would admit them. *Yeshivot* on the eastern model were few and the knowledge of tradition, therefore, often spotty, though it should be emphasized that even in the smallest villages there was still strict adherence to traditional Jewish ways. What appears to have taken place during the eighteenth century can be described as a cleavage between Jewish *practice* and Jewish *knowledge*.

German Jews spoke some form of German long before Moses Mendelssohn published his German translation of the Torah. However, their knowledge of the language was more often than not restricted to the local dialect which was all they needed in order to do business with their Gentile neighbors. Few Jews knew High German, and even fewer could decipher the Gothic characters which would enable them to read it—hence Mendelssohn's *Biur* rendered the German text in Hebrew letters.

There were exceptions of course. We are told of a Jew who was graduated from the University of Göttingen in 1739 and of others who were said to have attended the universities of Strassburg and Heidelberg.⁷ While there were still Jewish burghers who read Hebrew books,⁸

5. *Bericht an einige christliche Freunde von einem Versuch das arme jüdische Volck zur Erkenntnis und Annehmung der christlichen Wahrheit anzuleiten*; 2nd ed. (Halle, 1730). Successive volumes were published every year until 1791.

6. Judaeo-German, sometimes referred to as Western Yiddish, was characterized by a large number of expressions not known in Eastern Yiddish, but was not, like the latter, a complete literary tongue. After 1800, Jews in Germany learned to speak High German and their use of Judaeo-German diminished. (A dictionary of its terms and expressions that were still spoken at the time of the Nazi destruction was published by Werner Weinberg, *Die Reste des Jüdischdeutschen*, [Stuttgart, 1969]). Weinberg objects to the term "Western Yiddish" for Judaeo-German as inaccurate.

7. Lest this description lead the reader to think that, generally speaking, German Jews were living in a state of limited acceptance, let it be quickly added that there were many fiefdoms and localities where Jews were not even permitted to live; others where they required permission to get married; and still others where a Jew had to pay a head tax to be admitted to the city (like young Mendelssohn in Berlin).

8. Most popular were *Semahot ha-nefesh*, *Kaf ha-yashar*, *Orhot ha-hayyim*, *Menorat ha-ma'or*, as well as Joseph Bezalel's *Sefer ha-musar* and Ibn Daud's *Shalshet ha-kabbalah*.

there were increasing numbers who began to read German. The barriers which existed in France and Eastern Europe, where the language of the land was fundamentally different from Yiddish, did not exist in Germany, and this provided the ground for a much more rapid process of integration. Michael Meyer writes:

For a growing percentage of German Jewry secular interests, whether material or intellectual, were pushing aside religious ones. At the same time, Jewish institutions were becoming ever weaker. Higher Jewish education virtually ceased in Germany; rabbis as well as teachers soon came almost exclusively from Poland and the gap in world view between them and the German Jews they instructed widened more and more.⁹

Added thereto were more and more restrictions on Jewish communal autonomy. With controls by the *kehillah* thus lessened, Jewish religious behavior now became increasingly voluntary and, therefore, it was no wonder that some Jews escaped into the larger world altogether, leaving the Jewish community behind. Still, such defectors were only a small minority; the majority stayed within the fold and struggled as best they could with the new and uncharted challenge of living in two worlds: as Jews and also as participants in the opportunities now available beyond the old ghetto.

In this endeavor, Moses Mendelssohn played a key role, which has been described and evaluated in startlingly different ways. Since he was both a famous philosopher whose works were read by an admiring Gentile elite and, at the same time, an observant as well as learned Jew, he would seem to have been beyond any criticism from the traditionalists. This, however, was not the case. While his philosophical writings received no Jewish comment of note (probably because few rabbis could read German) and his staunch defense of Jewish rights earned him widespread praise, his translation of the *Humash* got him into deep trouble with the rabbinic establishment. It would not have been so bad, the latter reasoned, if his translation has been printed in Gothic script (which most Jews had not yet learned to read), but he had it printed in Hebrew characters that were familiar to every Jewish person. This aroused the palpable fear that reading the Torah in the German language would lead to further neglect of Hebrew studies, and Mendelssohn was, therefore, pilloried as one who sought to undermine Judaism and Jewish study. Even two generations later, Peretz Smolenskin, *maskil* and journalist, considered Mendelssohn as the arch reformer who, wittingly or otherwise, caused widespread defections from Judaism.

This is a flawed conclusion, because it ascribes to the savant from Dessau a historical role that he did not have. Later detractors of the Reform movement nonetheless drag this cliché out of the closet and point to the numerous conversions in Berlin's upper echelon and in

9. M. A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (New York: Oxford, 1988), p. 12.

Mendelssohn's own family after his death. What can, and must, be said about Mendelssohn is that he was the first intellectual among German Jews who had a high profile and enjoyed widespread admiration in the leading Gentile circles. *His major contribution was that he served as a role model and encouraged Jews to think that they, too, could achieve the status to which they aspired.*¹⁰ The impact of his German translation with Hebrew characters no doubt taught young and old something about High German and thereby facilitated their integration—but he neither originated it nor would the absence of his translation have made a significant difference in this process. Its key factors were the close link of Western Yiddish with German, and the liberal climate then prevalent in German intellectual circles.

This explains why only a relatively few years after Mendelssohn's death, when Napoleon's brother Jerome had become the king of Westphalia, there had already come into being an intellectual Jewish class who were familiar with both Jewish tradition and German ways—and, not surprisingly, they were, at first, mostly lay persons and only a few rabbis, the latter (as was pointed out earlier) being largely foreign born. These men faced a major challenge: how to stem the growing tide of defections from the Jewish faith.

With rare exceptions, their rabbis were no help to them; they were out of touch with the new realities. Israel Jacobson, however, was a leading exception. He followed his father-in-law, Hertz Samson (who died in 1795), as district rabbi in the Weser region, and he and his associates attempted to bring traditional Judaism into the modern world without disturbing the halakhic process.¹¹

Among their innovations were the use of German in *derashot*, occasional hymns in the German language, the omission of some late *kabbalistic* insertions in the prayer book, and the introduction of greater decorum in synagogue services. Thus, on Sukkot, the widespread levity existing during the *hakafot*, when paraders used their *lulavim* as objects of play, was prohibited in order to reinstitute greater sanctity in the service. Another innovation was moving the *bimah* from the center of the synagogue to the eastern side, near the *aron ha-kodesh*.

Crucial to the whole new approach (which none of the participants perceived as a reform movement) was the education of boys and girls who were to be instructed in halakhah as well as in specific moral precepts and, in due time, were to be "confirmed." The redoubtable scholar,

10. It is noteworthy that his *Jerusalem*, the one work in which he set forth his religious philosophy, had no impact whatever on his own or on succeeding generations.

11. Historians have generally described Jacobson as a lay person because, for one, he was a successful business man and, also, because during the crucial years of the Westphalian consistory, which he headed, he acted much as a chairman of a modern board and not as a chief rabbi. See details in Meyer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff.

Leopold Zunz, was a product of this system; he was confirmed in Wolfenbüttel in 1807.

Amidst such modest beginnings was the Reform movement born. Its initial stage, it must be emphasized again, was to proceed with utmost caution and to find for each step a plausible halakhic permission. *Its continuing goal was to keep Jews Jewish* by making Jewish practice and education such that people would consider them compatible with their modern sensibilities. These adjustments were a response to a development which had begun two generations earlier but only then, in the wake of the French revolution and its spread through Napoleon's influence, could it find proper expression.

To be sure, it could be anticipated that, once such minor innovations were deemed permissible, other more far-reaching changes would be in the offing. Leaders in the rabbinic establishment were, therefore, adamant that not a single innovation could, or should, find approval, not even the use of German for the sermon. Mendelssohn's *Humash* translation was banned and, in Berlin, the Orthodox¹² leadership used the police power of the government to close down the Reform temple.

Still, whatever changes were proposed by the reformers were first meticulously examined for compatibility with halakhic precedent or principle; arguments and counter-arguments were published; and the early rabbinic conferences, in the 1840s, were replete with halakhic discussions. Zunz and his successors created the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which applied scientific standards of research to Jewish historical, theological and liturgical studies. In time, as in all such endeavors, there developed a more radical wing which pressed for greater and bolder innovations, and which, in turn, also coalesced more conservative forces into an opposing group. Abraham Geiger and Zacharias Frankel, respectively, represented these two poles, and after some decades their adherents created the foundations of what today are the Reform and Conservative movements. They both stem from the identical desire of meeting the challenge of modernity and though, for many decades in the twentieth century, they appeared far apart, their ideological commonality was always present and, recently, surfaced most strongly in the debate over the proposed amendments to the Law of Return.

It should be underscored that, in Germany, the question of historic precedent was always asked and halakhic considerations were never out of sight (except for a small radical segment.) By North American standards of today, German Jewry remained, in this respect, staunchly "conservative" even in its liberalizing tendency, to the extent that ideo-

12. We use the term anachronistically, for it was then not yet in use. Quite often the word "conservative" doubled for what we today call orthodox. In turn, "conservative" did not attain to its present-day meaning until the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

logical dividing lines were largely blurred. How was one to categorize a synagogue whose *ritus* was strictly traditional but which had an organ (played by a Gentile)? Not surprisingly, the right-wing traditionalists eventually separated themselves from the general community and established their own *Austrittsgemeinde*, while, at the other end of the spectrum, the ultra-liberals (who were much fewer) also created their own structures. Until the days of the *Shoah*, the majority of German Jewry belonged to a centrist body politic which included Orthodox Jews of the school of Samson Raphael Hirsch, Conservative adherents of the school of Zacharias Frankel, and Liberals of the school of Ludwig Philippson and Leo Baeck.

Ideologues like to think that they create movements and, in certain cases, they do. But, while ideologues played a role in *shaping* the Reform movement in Germany, they did not *create* it. Political, socio-economic and demographic factors did. Once the sluice gates of emancipation had opened, Jews poured through them, while the ideologues of the movement tried to channel their lives in such a fashion that one could comfortably live in two worlds at once. The movement that they built step by step was, in a manner of speaking, a catching up with reality. It was, thus, a replay of a process well known to the teachers of Mishnah and Talmud, who had suggested a rule of thumb: first see what the people do. It is noteworthy that the Mishnah rarely gives its rules any scriptural foundations—these were adduced later when talmudic teachers asked: What was the reason for the Mishnah to state the law in this fashion? In similar manner did Reform scholars provide an evolving practice of acculturation with a progressive-halakhic basis and set limits beyond which one should not go. They also created a philosophical and theological framework which served as a guide to future challenges.

In sum then, Germany was the natural ground in which the consequences of Enlightenment first played themselves out. Its roots go back to the middle of the eighteenth century and, until the Nazis destroyed the community, German Jewry provided a remarkable success story in Jewish history. This success has been largely devalued in more recent Israeli and North American perceptions, to the extent that German Jewry has been described as having been largely assimilated and culturally ignorant. Quite the opposite is true—though, of course, there were plenty of assimilated Jews, especially in the large cities, and *ammei ha-arez* like everywhere else.

The real facts are that, while German Jewry grew in a basically conservative political soil and, therefore, never abandoned its traditional moorings, yet it proceeded to institute moderate reforms which were generally accepted by the broad majority. In the course of a century and a half this community created extraordinary institutions and movements: from Reform and Conservatism on one side, to Modern

Orthodoxy and the Agudath Israel on the other; from political Zionism to the Jewish National Fund; from day schools¹³ to modern rabbinical seminaries; and from the theories of *Wissenschaft* to a plethora of creative Jewish scholarship. In a way, German rabbis perfectly expressed the possibility of living meaningfully in two worlds: the great majority obtained a doctorate from a university before they took up their rabbinical posts and they were expected to make some contribution to Jewish scholarship.

Wherever German Jews went when they emigrated, they brought with them a belief that it was possible for them to live in two worlds. Translated into terms of religious development, that usually meant a propensity for Reform modes of worship and of lifestyle, and nowhere did this become more evident than in the United States.¹⁴

2. *The American Experience*

America's social and political environment displayed its liberalizing and egalitarian tendencies long before the French Revolution, and the War of Independence increased their momentum and actualized them quickly. In addition, the effects of the French Revolution were felt in America as well, in part because many new settlers from Europe came precisely in order to experience the realization of hopes which Emancipation had raised but had not fulfilled. Full civil liberties for everyone became the norm, except for some marginal disabilities in some states which, as in Maryland, were removed in the early part of the nineteenth century. Thus, almost from the outset, living in two worlds was the context of the American Jewish experience. Freedom created a challenge which had never before faced Diaspora Jews as it now did in America.

Spanish-Portuguese Jews could cope with it in traditional terms as long as they lived in large cities, primarily New York and Philadelphia, where they could create close-knit communities. But in smaller cities, they, too, began to look for ways which would preserve their Judaism in the midst of new American opportunities. Thus, the earliest reformist tendencies had already developed before the German Jews came en masse after the 1840s.¹⁵ But once they arrived and spread across the

13. Day schools existed even in the smallest villages. Thus, in Merzhausen and Willingshausen, two adjacent villages in the backwoods of Hessen, the Jewish children did not go to public school. Instead, the ten or twelve families engaged their own teacher who taught civic as well as Jewish subjects.

14. And, much later also in Israel and South America. But where German Jews were few, as in Canada, Reform Judaism was slow to develop. The one major exception was Great Britain, where Progressive Judaism (in its Liberal and Reform manifestations) was essentially indigenous.

15. The Charleston, SC, reforms date from 1824/25. The city then boasted of the largest Jewish population in the United States, some 600 souls. For a full description see Meyer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 228 ff.

country, and often did so as pioneers, Reform Judaism became the dominant form of Jewish worship and thought outside of the Eastern coast—and there, too, its adherents assumed a leading role in their communities.

The American experience was not, however, a replay of its German antecedents. For here, there was no immobile social structure to stultify individual progress, and there were vast stretches of land with new and growing settlements, where previous privilege was absent and Jews had an equal chance for success. Moreover, while Reform in Europe remained within certain traditional boundaries, in America these restraining influences were absent. The New World did not grow within rigid legal parameters, and the right to bear arms, which every citizen enjoyed by dint of the Constitution, was the clearest expression of a subterranean stream of antinomianism that flowed through America's veins.

No wonder, then, that traditional forms and inherited norms assumed a different cast. Where in Europe the Reformers had always referred to a halakhic precedent and had, so to speak, asked *Mah yomru ha-avot?* (What would tradition say?), in America they asked a different question. Here, the *avot* were far away and surfaced primarily in the *Shemoneh esreh*. In the minds of the new immigrants the Ancestors were somewhere in Europe, far away from the American experience. In Europe, Jews were living in ameliorated bondage, but bondage nonetheless; in America, the Gentiles seemed ready to accept Jews as neighbors and fellow citizens. It was vital, therefore, (or so it appeared to the Jews) to wrap oneself in the mantle of this new and exciting society, which was easing the task of living in two worlds at once. No longer did they now refer to halakhic precedent but, rather, to American need and opportunity. Customs began to reflect the American ambience: prayers and songs were increasingly in English; religious services were made shorter; and here and there worshippers began to remove their head-coverings. In the newly developing states and territories, *kashrut* was difficult to maintain, especially when not enough Jews lived in the vicinity to provide slaughtering facilities; traditional *shabbat* rest created a palpable hardship for retailers (a substantial segment of the Jewish community), and the prohibition of travel on *shabbat* and holy days was breached by many who were otherwise, because of long distances, excluded from joining a community on its chief days of prayer.

For a while the rabbis tried to view the flow of change in traditional terms, relating it, where possible, to some precedent, but, thereafter, the more radical reformers (most of them of German origin) based their permission to institute changes, or justify them where the people had already made them, on the "spirit of the age" or "the American way."

Ideology most often became a handmaiden to reforms that the people had already instituted in their lives; it approved change, and America was the land of changing and overturning the old. Reform

radicalism, dubbed “classical” by many (though that is hardly an appropriate term), found its purest expression in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. It was also the decade in which the first large contingents of East European Jews began to arrive and, within a few years, the face of American Jewish society would be radically altered. The newcomers, with their memories and sentiments, joined Reform congregations and soon began to change them, giving the old “classical” Reform new form and content.

The rise of anti-Semitism and the shock of the Holocaust destroyed the belief of the Reformers that the “two-world challenge” had been successfully met. The task of facing the challenge remained as urgent as ever, but it became evident that the old and easy answers would not do. There was Israel now, presenting the possibility of abolishing the Diaspora altogether; the concept of the American melting pot was challenged by new multi-cultural and multi-ethnic realities which made cultural integration less urgent for Jews.

By the advent of the nineteen-eighties, *mizvah* had returned to the vocabulary of Reform; Jewish education advanced, as did Jewish scholarship; traditional forms marked the worship service, but worship itself was not high on the agenda of most American Reform Jews. The vitality of Reform seemed unabated, though its direction and thrust had changed, and it was not always clear where the movement was headed. That question was increasingly asked, and the asking highlighted one of the persistent features of Reform: its constant self-criticism. Where *was* it headed on the eve of the two hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution?

3. *Living in Two Worlds*

Until fairly recently the challenge of two-tiered existence that faces Diaspora Jews was met on the proving grounds of *practice*. Were the demands of halakhah met or were they not? And if not, where was the departure? How great was the discrepancy between the old and the new?

With all of the developing differences, however, the danger of schism did not arise; Reform Jews might seem, at times, to resemble Karaites in their critique of talmudic rules, but this did not lead the Orthodox to doubt their legitimate membership in the Jewish people. In fact, the prime impact of Enlightenment on Western Jewry had been the emergence of personal autonomy, which challenged the hitherto unquestioned authority of tradition. Just how and when the privilege of personal choice entered the thought of Reform is uncertain, but there can be little doubt that it has today become entrenched in its halls.¹⁶

16. One other important facet of the Revolution also remained compelling: the drive for social justice. Reform Judaism, basing itself on the biblical Prophets, made it a cornerstone of its moral edifice.

In this respect, Enlightenment continues to have its direct impact on the movement and distinguishes it from the other branches. Neither Orthodoxy, nor Conservatism has (with negligible exceptions) elevated personal choice to a role of legitimacy.¹⁷ The latter diverges from Orthodoxy only in the way that it *interprets* halakhah, but, in principle, it adheres to the halakhic system. This has generally been a matter of degrees, for, in many instances, Conservative congregations, and especially some of their rabbis, were, in practice, quite indistinguishable from their Orthodox counterparts.

But, of late, other considerations have come to the fore which pit all non-Orthodox against adherents of the old way. One may call this a delayed reaction of Enlightenment. For what the latter brought in its train, along with the profound upheaval of established authority, was a belief in the *supremacy of human reason*. For several generations the more mundane tasks of rearranging national and personal lives constituted the prime agenda of political as well as religious institutions, and ideology retreated into the background. It moved into the foreground again when scientific advances, positivism, and modernist thoughts of various kinds swept Western universities.

Again, Germany became the seedbed of many of these developments. Here, biblical criticism flowered from the middle of the nineteenth-century on, and its major premise was slowly adopted by all non-Orthodox Jews. Torah (certainly not in its present form) was not *mi-Sinai*, but was the result of hundreds of years of development. Judaism was a changing, always evolving religion. Tanakh, Mishnah and Gemara were its major expressions in antiquity, but, while one needed to base oneself on these sources, inspiration had not necessarily ceased nor had human reason shriveled since those days. There was little question that non-Orthodox Jews of all stripes took Torah to be the result of historical development.

Where was God, then, in this process? How could one still say *Barukh she-natan Torah le-ammo Yisrael*?

In his "General Introduction to the Torah," the writer met the question this way:

While God is not the author of the Torah in the fundamentalist sense, the Torah is a book about humanity's understanding of and experience with God . . . Torah is ancient Israel's distinctive record of its search for God. It attempts to record the meeting of the human and the Divine, the great moments of encounter . . . God is not the author of the text, the people are; but God's voice may be heard through theirs if we listen with open minds.¹⁸

17. Reconstructionist teaching is not clear in this matter; at times it seems to lean in the direction of giving personal choice a role in the decision making process.

18. *The Torah—A Modern Commentary*, ed. W. G. Plaut, 5th ed., 1988, p. xviii f.

Even so, this view is unacceptable to the Orthodox. It is either literally *Torah min ha-Shamayim* or nothing. One either believes it or one does not, and no circumlocutions will do. On this level of discourse any bridging of the gap between Orthodox and non-Orthodox appears impossible, at least for the foreseeable future. If there is to be a rapprochement it would have to be based on the agreement that inquiry into a person's belief is unhelpful. What counts is a common ground of practice, at least in those essentials that affect the whole people.¹⁹

Thus, ideology, which, after the early days of Enlightenment followed popular practice and gave it a belated underpinning, has now become the battle ground that it once was. Two hundred years after the Revolution the drums are beating again and Jews are taking sides once more.

In one sense this may be regretted, because it appears to threaten the unity of our people. But, in another, it may be a blessing in disguise, for, after several generations who disregarded principle in favor of practice, the roots of our religion are once more exposed. The Orthodox are aligned on one side and all non-Orthodox on the other. That is the way it was more than a hundred years ago, and we survived that struggle. I have every confidence that we will do it again, for, after all, it is a controversy waged *leshem Shamayim*.

But intra-religious tension is only one aspect of Diaspora living. Its freedom also provides the possibility to be a maximal or minimal Jew, to do much or nothing, or anything in between. While all branches of Judaism try to persuade their adherents to live as much of a Jewish life as possible, Reform faces perhaps the greatest challenge because it embraces the two-tier condition of Diaspora living as a desideratum. That was the genesis of Reform's existence and that, in its way, makes it hard to be a Reform Jew. The movement has experienced spectacular successes but also serious failures, for the greater the freedom of the Jew, the greater the challenge. We would not wish it any other way.

19. I would reckon *ishut* amongst these but would insist that, as long as its practice is acceptable, ideology must not be at issue. The *Mi hu Yehudi* controversy is an illustration of the present impasse: It does not matter that non-Orthodox rabbis follow the practice of *giyyur* meticulously; the Orthodox will, at present, not accept the authenticity of those presiding at the ceremony. What is at stake is not the latter's learning (especially since *musmakhim* are not even required) but their ideological stance. Yet it is here, also, that I see a glimmer of future accommodation. The Orthodox might come to say, in the words put by the Talmud in the mouth of the Almighty: What they think about Me is less important than what they do.

Mendelssohn's Defense of Reason in Jerusalem

MICHAEL L. MORGAN

MOSES MENDELSSOHN'S *JERUSALEM* IS UNQUESTIONABLY the most important Jewish *apologia* of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. It is the work, that is, of a member of the Enlightenment, who was a Jew and who employed the tools of the Enlightenment in this work in order to defend the authenticity and legitimacy of Jewish life. Moreover, primary among these tools was reason, especially philosophical and scientific reason. For the Enlightenment was, among other things, a tribute to reason. But reason is a vehicle to universal truth—metaphysical, scientific, and moral. Hence, for Mendelssohn to use reason in order to defend Jewish particularity may seem impossible and even paradoxical. I would like to show that it is not.

Indeed, I want to make an even more extreme proposal. Not only is it wholly acceptable that Mendelssohn should have used reason to defend the particularity of Judaism; it is also necessary that he did so. For *Jerusalem* is a defense of Judaism and, at the same time, a defense of reason. It is, in other words, as much a paradigmatic Enlightenment tract as it is a model Jewish one. *Jerusalem* is a remarkable synthesis of Mendelssohn's twin commitments, to Judaism and to reason.

The most common way to treat *Jerusalem* is to interpret it as Mendelssohn's response to a set of events that led to a challenge to convert.¹ These events have often been chronicled.² They include the publication of *On the Civil Improvement of the Jews*, a defense of Jewish emancipation by Christian Wilhelm Dohm, in 1781;³ Mendelssohn's "Preface" to the

1. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, Or on Religious Power and Judaism*, trans., Allan Arkush; intro. & commentary, Alexander Altmann (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 84–87.

2. See Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society; University of Alabama Press, 1973); Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), Chs. 1 and 2; Michael L. Morgan, "History and Modern Jewish Thought: Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the Ritual Law," *JUDAISM* 30, 4 (Fall, 1981): 467–478.

3. For a discussion of Dohm's treatise and the Conservative reaction to it, see Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 220–229.

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German translation of Menasseh ben Israel's *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (1782); and the subsequent challenge to Mendelssohn that came in the form of a brochure, "The Search for Light and Right in a Letter to Herr Moses Mendelssohn Occasioned by his Remarkable Preface to Menasseh ben Israel" (Berlin, 1782). The upshot of these and the surrounding events, all of which occurred within a public, political debate concerning Jewish civil emancipation, was the publication of *Jerusalem* in April, 1783. It was a work that contained Mendelssohn's arguments for the separation of church and state, for political toleration of religious diversity, against the religious right to excommunication, and for the continued binding nature of Jewish ceremonial law with Jewish particularity. It is small wonder that, as we look back on the work and its historical context, we are inclined to treat it as Mendelssohn's premier attempt to defend his Jewish fidelity.

As so often happens, however, when scanning a person's life and attending to its most impressive episodes, we are tempted to isolate events and actions even when they actually overlapped in time. We forget, for example, that during the same period when he was writing the *Principia*, Isaac Newton was also taking extensive notes on the Bible and studying alchemy and that Martin Buber's research on Hasidism took place at the same time that he was involved with the nascent Zionist movement. In general, there are a variety of contexts within which any given work can be interpreted, and that is true here, in the case of *Jerusalem*. Written in 1782 and published in April of 1783, it was surely precipitated by Dohm's treatise and the responses to Mendelssohn's "Preface." But Mendelssohn's life during the early 1780s had other dimensions and, if we notice them, we discover another context for *Jerusalem*, a context that brings together its rationalism and its Jewish commitment in an especially significant way.

On February 15, 1781, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing died at the age of fifty-two.⁴ The famous literary and theological figure had been a long-time, close friend of Mendelssohn. His death saddened Mendelssohn, but it also brought unexpected anxiety to his life. From 1783 until his own death in 1786, Mendelssohn was embroiled in a bitter, difficult debate regarding Lessing's final beliefs. Although *Jerusalem* was not a constituent of that controversy, it was written just prior to its eruption. What I would like to show is how *Jerusalem* is, in a way, part of Mendelssohn's overall contribution to this important controversy and hence, as part of his defense of reason, is part of the intellectual landscape of German philosophy in the 1780s.

In a recent, brilliant treatment of German philosophy from 1781 to 1793, Frederick Beiser has examined in detail the so-called Panthe-

4. Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, p. 582; see generally, Chs. 7 & 8, pp. 553–759.

ism Controversy concerning Lessing's final beliefs.⁵ It would be impossible to recount the path of the controversy here, but we must have some idea of how it arose and what role Mendelssohn played in it. Moreover, in order to place *Jerusalem* against its background, we must understand the issues that the controversy raised and why they were so vital to all German philosophy and theology.

After Lessing's death, Mendelssohn conceived of a work on Lessing's character, as an emblem of the Enlightenment, but, by 1783, the work was still to be written. In August of that year, Mendelssohn was informed that F. H. Jacobi, who had written on Lessing in 1782, had evidence that, in his last days, Lessing had admitted to being a Spinozist. On November 4, 1783, Jacobi wrote to Mendelssohn, describing his conversations with Lessing in which the latter confessed his agreement with Spinoza.⁶ What ensued was a series of thrusts, parries, counterthrusts, and more, a game of deception, manipulation, and conflict, which extended far beyond Mendelssohn and Jacobi to engulf large segments of the German intellectual world. Our concern is not with the controversy itself, its development, or its featured players. But we need to know what it was about and what role Mendelssohn occupied. For *Jerusalem* was written only months before it and, I shall try to show, from the same point of view that Mendelssohn occupied during the subsequent controversy.

The career of Spinoza's thinking in eighteenth century Germany was not a uniform one. But, to many, "Spinoza's philosophy stood for radical scientific naturalism . . . and the consequence of Spinoza's philosophy, if it were to delete its superfluous religious language, was atheism and fatalism."⁷ Hence, the systematic and thorough application of reason, in the form of Spinozism, was seen to lead to the destruction of "morality, religion, and the state." The controversy over Lessing's alleged Spinozism, then, was really a conflict over the ultimate outcome of rational philosophy. Were the philosophers of the Enlightenment right in their confidence that reason is the final justification for morality, religion, and the state? Or was Spinoza's philosophy, with its atheism and fatalism, proof of the *real* outcome of reason? As Beiser shows, the debate between Jacobi and Mendelssohn, a debate that literally engulfed the German intellectual world, was not primarily a personal one. Rather, it was a debate between faith and reason, between the opponents of Enlightenment and its advocates, for whom it was then a defense of reason.

Specifically, the late eighteenth century saw reason confronted with

5. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). In the following paragraphs I am indebted to Beiser's stunning account.

6. Ibid., pp. 65–68.

7. Ibid., p. 2; cf. pp. 48–61, 76.

a variety of challenges. Scientific naturalism was one, and Spinoza was taken to be one representative of this tendency. Relativism was another challenge, as was nihilism and the denial of universal value and purpose. The Enlightenment philosopher had hailed reason as a secure foundation for all that human beings valued—morality, religion, and the state. But the rise of the new science, conservative religious tendencies, and the skeptical challenge of David Hume threatened reason's happy role. Many argued that, instead of being the ground of value, reason was really its nemesis.⁸

These issues were to crystallize during the decade from 1783 to 1793. But they were already in the air in the preceding years. Hence, when Mendelssohn was called upon in 1782 to defend his political and religious views, it was against the background of this multifaceted challenge to the "authority of reason." Moreover, there is every reason to think that Mendelssohn's own role in the subsequent debate as a defender of Leibnizian-Wolffian rationalism, a position which would be represented in his contribution to the controversy, the *Morgenstunden* of 1785, already had taken shape during these earlier years. Long before 1785, for example, in his *Philosophische Gespräche* of 1755, Mendelssohn had thought about Spinoza's philosophy, defended it, and argued for its compatibility with morality and religion.⁹

As Beiser describes it, what was at stake for Mendelssohn was his life-long commitment to rationalist metaphysics and "the inspiring hope behind that metaphysics—the assumption that we could rationally demonstrate beliefs in God, immortality, and providence."¹⁰ To Jacobi and Mendelssohn, Lessing was a symbol of the Enlightenment spirit and its allegiance to reason. If Lessing were shown to be a Spinozist, then the Enlightenment would have been shown to carry within its admiration for reason the seeds of its own destruction. For Spinozism exhibited reason leading to atheism and fatalism; it led metaphysics and all speculative philosophy away from morality and religion and not towards it.¹¹ Hence, Mendelssohn's contribution to the controversy is an attempt to show how rational metaphysics does, in fact, ground our beliefs in God, the soul, immortality, and divine providence by showing what rational inquiry is and how reason is the ultimate ground of truth.¹²

Jerusalem was written as a response to the "Searcher" and to other critics of Mendelssohn's "Preface," as a defense of Judaism, of tolerance, and of the autonomous nature of religious belief and conduct. It is also, however, a defense of reason, although perhaps not a wholly

8. Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, p. 67.

9. See Beiser, *Op. cit.*, pp. 52–54.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 78–81.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 94–108, on Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden*, the first volume of the projected two-part work on Lessing.

effective one.¹³ But, we must ask, exactly how and with what effect does *Jerusalem* perform this task? How is it a defense of the authority of reason?

In Chapter 7 of his *Morgenstunden*, Mendelssohn defends the ideal of rational inquiry. The philosopher's duty is to inquire, to examine, and to investigate. Neither one's interests nor one's moral responsibilities nor the likely consequences of one's actions should interfere with this duty. Like Socrates in Plato's *Meno*, Mendelssohn hails the virtues of vigorous inquiry, and, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, he points out that such an attitude opposes superstition, fanaticism, and intolerance.¹⁴ Mendelssohn's rationalism, then, is as opposed to dogmatism as it is to skepticism. But, as Beiser notes,

there is an apparent circle in Mendelssohn's defense of objective inquiry. Mendelssohn is able to justify value-free inquiry only by using certain moral and political values, namely, those of liberalism. Hence it seems as if he has quit objective inquiry in order to justify it, or as if he has abandoned reason in order to justify it. [However, it is not clear that the circle is vicious, for, as Beiser continues], it now depends on whether or not we can determine the right or wrong, the good or evil, of Mendelssohn's political values by a process of sheer rational argument and objective inquiry. . . . [I]f so, then the whole case for objective inquiry has moved into a new and hitherto unexpected field: that of political philosophy. In this case, Mendelssohn's defense of reason in *Morgenstunden* ultimately rests upon his defense of liberalism in *Jerusalem*.¹⁵

One dimension of Mendelssohn's defense of reason in *Jerusalem*, then, is his use of reason to ground his liberalism and values such as tolerance. Elsewhere I have argued that there is a deep incoherence in Mendelssohn's liberalism, an incoherence that is reflected in the differing conceptions of the self that his views require. But part of that incoherence arises precisely because Mendelssohn so vigorously defends his commitment to Judaism, its distinctive ceremonial laws and its particular history. That is, Mendelssohn's liberal state is inhabited by rational, moral agents who are also characterized essentially by their special obligations, traditions, and histories. The liberal state must not merely tolerate such diversity and particularity; it must also, in a sense, express it, a task that it seems incapable of performing.¹⁶

This dissonance, however, would be mitigated if Mendelssohn's defense of Jewish particularity were itself a rational defense and a successful one. It is worth examining Part Two of *Jerusalem* to see whether this is so. Does Mendelssohn use reason in order to defend Judaism, and exactly how does his defense proceed? And if his defense is a ra-

13. See later, and Beiser, *Op. cit.*, pp. 107–108.

14. Beiser, *Op. cit.*, pp. 96–98. Not all agreed, however, as Epstein shows; see Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism*, p. 72.

15. Beiser, *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

16. "Liberalism in Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*," *The History of Political Thought* (forthcoming). For a discussion of the Hegelian critique of liberalism, along similar lines, see Steven B. Smith, *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Ch. 3.

tional one, how successful is it? In short, whereas students of Mendelssohn have generally worried about how much of Judaism is neglected or elided by Mendelssohn's argument, here we shall ask how much rationality is compromised in performing the task.

One might understand Spinoza's challenge to Judaism in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), a work that provides part of the background for *Jerusalem*, as the challenge of universality.¹⁷ That is, in that work Spinoza shows that a rational, scientific reading of Scripture reveals that its religious teaching is a moral one, a "universal faith of all mankind," and not any particular, positive religious faith. The gist of that universal moral faith are the twin duties, justice and benevolence. The lesson of the *Tractatus* is that this universal moral faith, taught by Scripture when interpreted correctly, lies between vulgar, superstitious religion and pure philosophical-scientific piety. Along with fatalism, then, and naturalistic ethics, Spinoza is a universalist, an enemy of religious particularism and pluralism, and the advocate of moral-religious homogeneity.

To ward off the threats posed by Spinozism, Mendelssohn not only had to refute Spinoza's pantheism and to demonstrate the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the reality of providence; he also had to defend by rational argument the distinctiveness, the particularity of Judaism. He had to show that reason justified Judaism, a precise religious way of life and belief that incorporated, but was not exhausted by, rational morality.¹⁸ This would be a rational defense of religious diversity, and it would show that reason does not ultimately obliterate toleration.¹⁹

How does Mendelssohn perform this task? Commentators generally understand Mendelssohn's argument this way. The ancient Mosaic commonwealth is *sui generis*, a polity in which civil law includes the ceremonial and ritual obligations that were commanded originally at Sinai and elaborated by the legal tradition. Then, as now, these rituals laws bound and bind solely the Jewish people. Always, their purpose has been to stimulate awareness, by Jews and others, of the metaphysical truths without which moral probity and happiness cannot be achieved. These truths include the existence of one God, the immortality of the soul, and divine providence. With the destruction of that ancient state and in the course of history, the Jewish people and the gentile nations

17. See Morgan, "History and Modern Jewish Thought."

18. Mendelssohn also recognized the *need* for a similar rational defense of Christianity, although he may not have been sanguine about providing it. See the famous image of the house in *Jerusalem*, p. 87.

19. Hannah Arendt has argued that certain ways of arguing for toleration camouflage opposition to religious diversity. See her title essay on Lessing in *Men in Dark Times*. Cf. the article on Arendt in Susan Mendus, ed., *Justifying Toleration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

have grown forgetful of these truths and have become alienated from the moral conduct based on them. In a lengthy excursus, Mendelssohn discusses the origin and history of language in order to show why God ordained ritual conduct and not literary symbol as the vehicle for stimulating recollection of these metaphysical truths. He then urges that the need is still present, the laws remain unrevoked and, hence, the duty to perform these laws is still binding.²⁰

In what way is this a *rational argument* for the Jews' continued obligation to obey the ceremonial law and, hence, to maintain a distinct, separate religious identity in the midst of Enlightenment Prussia? First, the argument assumes, but does not provide, a rational demonstration of the metaphysical truths concerning God, the soul, and providence.²¹ Secondly, Mendelssohn uses non-metaphysical argument, based on Scripture and historical-political interpretation, to give an account of the Mosaic constitution and of the subsequent history of the Jewish people, the gentile nations, and the condition of moral conduct in the West. Thirdly, he uses historical-anthropological reasoning to give an account of the origin and history of language. Finally, he assumes the nature of moral obligation and seems to infer the obligation to perform Jewish ceremonial law as instrumental to moral fulfillment.

We must say something about each of these features of Mendelssohn's argument. First, while the goal of Mendelssohn's reasoning is to demonstrate a continued Jewish obligation to obey the ceremonial law, this demonstration requires the elaboration of non-metaphysical and non-practical knowledge, regarding Jewish history, law, and much else. In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn distinguishes, in a traditional way, between eternal and temporal or historical truths. While the former, e.g., mathematical and logical truths, are verified by reason alone, the latter require *observation* as well as reason (*Jerusalem*, 92). In the domain of temporal truths, both scientific and historical, "we must experience, observe, and test individual cases" and "accept many things, on faith and authority, from others" (92). To be sure, if the issue is crucial and we have doubts, we are less likely to trust others and will carry out the experiments ourselves (92). But, in the case of strictly historical truths, we cannot repeat them and simply must trust the testimony and authority of others (93). "In historical matters, the authority and credibility of the narrator constitute the only evidence" (93).

Mendelssohn follows his own precepts. As he develops his account of ancient Judaism, of its lack of dogmatism, of its doctrines and its laws, he relies on the Bible, Midrash, and other traditional texts as his

20. For a more detailed account of Mendelssohn's argument, see Morgan, "History and Modern Jewish Thought," and the references in note 2.

21. *Jerusalem*, pp. 89–90, 102. Mendelssohn often attempted to provide such arguments. Of special interest is the discussion in *Morgenstunden* (1785).

sources. In short, he uses texts as reliable evidence for reconstructing his account and reason to weigh, evaluate, and employ that evidence. The upshot is a picture of Judaism as a rational, moral faith, in which its most central teachings are a matter of oral instruction and intercourse and not of dead script. Antiquity was a time when "teaching was more closely connected with life, contemplation more intimately bound up with action" (104). Indeed, as he puts it in an especially suggestive sentence, in ancient, original Judaism

[t]he ceremonial law itself is a kind of living script, rousing the mind and heart, full of meaning, never ceasing to inspire contemplation and to provide the occasion and opportunity for oral instruction (102–103).

The teacher was a model, the student a striving, responsive disciple.

A large portion of Mendelssohn's argument involves a justification for the special role of ceremonial law and ritual conduct as God's chosen vehicle for "inspiring contemplation" of the eternal truths regarding God, providence, and the soul's immortality. This justification features a discussion of the origin and development of language and the rise of idolatry.²² It is certainly not necessary to review all of Mendelssohn's story, which is a combination of philosophical history, anthropology, linguistics, and natural science, but we should notice some of its foremost features. He begins with the observation that human beings were first moved

to attach [concepts formed out of external impressions] to perceptible signs, not only in order to communicate them to others, but also to hold fast to them himself, and to be able to consider them again as often as necessary (105, 107). [Mendelssohn affirms pre-linguistic conceptualization—] [t]he first steps toward the separation of general characteristics he *can*, and indeed *must* take without making use of signs—[but he argues that thinking, which requires recall, must use symbols, natural and arbitrary signs]. For without the aid of signs, man can scarcely remove himself one step from the sensual (105).

Mendelssohn's comments are brief, but they are substantial enough to reflect his sympathy with Condillac, rather than with Rousseau or Herder, both of whom saw natural need as the ground of language.²³

Mendelssohn suggests the route by which visible sign systems took shape. First, people doubtless used the sense impression itself to draw attention to a distinctive feature of the sensible object, e.g., the sensory impression of a lion as a sign of courage (107–108).²⁴ Then they more conveniently used images on surfaces, then outlines, parts of outlines, and finally "a shapeless but *meaningful whole*," i.e., *hieroglyphics* (108). The transition from such figures to alphabetic script, however, "seems

22. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, pp. 104–125.

23. Cf. Beiser, *Op cit.*, pp. 130–141.

24. See Nelson Goodman, *The Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1968), for an analysis of this type of reference, which he calls expression.

to have required a leap," a transition that Mendelssohn associates with sound and speech (108–110). Eventually Mendelssohn turns to corruption and the tendency of peoples to mistake the name for the thing named and to worship the sign rather than the thing signified. Hence, he concludes, "the need for written characters was the first cause of idolatry" (113).

Mendelssohn's conclusion is that the ceremonial law of Judaism is an act of providence (117–120). The Jewish people was

a nation which, through its establishment and constitution, through its laws, actions, vicissitudes, and changes was continually to call attention to sound and unadulterated ideas of God and His attributes (118).

But permanent signs, especially written text, lead to "superstition and idolatry" and encourage abstract speculation. For this reason, God gave this people the *ceremonial law*. Actions are not permanent and thus do not invite idolatry, and unlike texts they do not isolate people but encourage

social intercourse, . . . imitation, and . . . oral, living instruction. Thus teaching and life, wisdom and activity, speculation and sociability were most intimately connected (119–120).

Originally, then, in the Mosaic constitution, the ceremonial was the providential bond connecting life and theory (128). It encouraged interpersonal exchange and stimulated contemplation of the eternal truths about God and the soul which facilitated moral perfection and happiness. This is the core of Mendelssohn's argument, a rational account of the original role of ritual law based on a philological, historical, and rational reconstruction.

But Mendelssohn's argument has a final turn, for his object is not to demonstrate historically the existence of a *fact*. Rather, Mendelssohn's goal is the demonstration of an *obligation*. Hence, his argument must have a practical dimension. It will conclude with an "ought," it must include one in its reasoning.

The standard interpretation is that Mendelssohn's reasoning is instrumental. It goes as follows: each person is morally obligated to seek moral perfection; but, in order to seek moral perfection one must believe in God, immortality, and providence. People, however, have forgotten these truths. The Jewish ceremonial law is a constant reminder of these truths. Hence, the Jewish people are obligated to obey the ceremonial law.

There is a grave problem with this argument. Its conclusion binds the Jew to obey the ceremonial laws of Judaism by a particular, non-moral obligation. Only the Jew, but no one else, is so bound. However, the argument, in its first premise, enjoins a universal obligation on all people, the moral obligation to moral excellence. How can a universal obligation give rise to a particular one? And how can a moral obligation entail a non-moral one?

At first glance it is tempting to think that Mendelssohn ignored this problem altogether.²⁵ But a close reading of the crucial pages of *Jerusalem* shows that, at least in part, Mendelssohn's argument comes to grips with this problem explicitly and directly and solves it, or purports to do so. That solution can be uncovered by understanding Mendelssohn's important claim that, in the original Mosaic constitution and in the ancient Jewish polity "state and religion were not conjoined, but *one*; not connected, but identical" (128; cf. 128–134).

The key to Mendelssohn's justification of the continued obligation to obey the ceremonial laws of Judaism is the fact that those laws were once, and always remain, civil laws, even in 1783, when the state no longer exists. They were never obligatory *as a means* to moral fulfillment, although that has always been their purpose. Rather, they were always, and remain, obligatory as the civil law of the Jewish state. And even though they are religious legislation, they *could* be civil law in *that* state, because it was a *sui generis* constitution in which civil and religious spheres uniquely coincided and were *one*. Hence, as long as these laws were never revoked, even after the state's destruction, these civil laws, the ceremonial legislation of Judaism, remain in force.²⁶

Mendelssohn's argument, then, has two decisive grounds. One is the providential act which established the ceremonial laws as civil laws of the original Mosaic constitution; the other is the fact that even after the state's destruction, God has not revoked the law.

[P]ersonal commandments . . . must, as far as we can see, be observed strictly according to the words of the law, until it shall please the Most High to set our conscience at rest and to make their abrogation known in a clear voice and in a public manner (134).

The *purpose* of the ceremonial law remains the same: to stimulate contemplation, inquiry and, ultimately, moral perfection and to avoid idolatry. Its *obligation* does not derive from that purpose but is the outcome of divine legislation. It is a legal obligation and not an obligation derivative from moral duty.

There is, however, a question that remains, and it is one that Alexander Altmann has noticed in his magisterial biography.

What Mendelssohn failed to explain was why Providence left the rest of mankind without a comparable legislation that would serve it as a safeguard against idolatry and as a bond between doctrine and life.²⁷

As Altmann comments, Mendelssohn should have argued for a *universal revealed legislation*. But he did not. The ceremonial law as an act of

25. In "History and Modern Jewish Thought" I tried to imagine ways that Mendelssohn could deal with this problem. The following account is meant to supersede that reading.

26. I have discussed this particular strategy and the Hobbesian background of the argument based on the fact of the sovereign's silence in "Overcoming the Remoteness of the Past: Memory and Historiography in Modern Jewish Thought," JUDAISM, 38, 2 (Spring 1989): 160–171.

27. Alexander Altmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 547.

Providence, in the end, remains impenetrable to reason; as an historical reality it can be only partially understood. Ultimately, the particularity of Judaism rests on a mystery.

Mendelssohn's defense of reason in *Jerusalem* occurs as an attempt to justify Jewish particularity by rational means. But the defense fails because it is finally grounded in the mystery of divine providence. In recognizing this outcome, we can, however, already glimpse the staring point of later reflections on Jewish existence. Mendelssohn remained staunchly committed to reason; others will see its limitations and they will begin, where we have seen him conclude, with divine mystery. But this is another episode in the history both of Judaism and of reason in the modern world and one whose story must be left for another occasion.

A Post-Enlightenment Exposition of Creationism

NOAH H. ROSENBLOOM

THE WORKS OF THE EARLY MENTORS OF THE Jewish Enlightenment, *Haskalah*, in Germany contain only few and meager references to the natural sciences, a strange phenomenon in an age which basked in the radiance of Descartes and Newton. In the scant existing references there is no intimation of a possible impending clash, or even a sense of acuity, in the relation between those sciences and traditional Judaism. On the basis of the extant voluminous writings of Moses Mendelssohn it is impossible to detect such an apprehension. It is plausible that, notwithstanding his liberal outlook and philosophic erudition, he may not have fathomed that the ascendancy in scientific knowledge would undermine the foundations of religion. He was aware that men far more erudite and proficient in the natural sciences, to mention only Boyle and Newton, never noticed such a threat. The latter, like a legion of other illustrious scientists in the preceding two centuries, considered the new scientific discoveries a further substantiation and corroboration of the postulates of religion.

There may be less certainty, however, about Mendelssohn's perception concerning the compatibility of science and the Bible, particularly the Genesis exposition of cosmology. As the initiator and leading mentor of the *Biur*, the first modern commentary on the Bible and the most significant and influential exegetical enterprise of the Jewish Enlightenment in Germany, it seems unlikely that he did not encounter any incongruities or disagreements between the Biblical exposition of the process of creation and the scientific theories of his day. Considering, however, the precarious position of the Jews in Germany, the inhospitable climate for new ideas in the Jewish community, and the centripetal forces that dominated it, any speculation in this respect would have had disastrous consequences. As a result, Mendelssohn's writings, especially those in Hebrew, border on the oxymoronic. They are replete with phraseological subtleties, sanctimonious equivocations, a most remarkable and valuable source for a sociologist and psychologist rather than for a student of intellectual history. Compelled by external and internal circumstances and walking gingerly between two antithetical domains, he had to maintain a Janus-like posture, employing a lan-

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guage which echoed and responded to convention rather than to conviction.

While Mendelssohn's attitude may be inconclusive, there is hardly any evidence that his colleagues and followers, the *maskilim*, even those who collaborated with him on the *Biur*, had evinced a greater sensitivity to the possible implications of science for Biblical cosmogony or had any premonitions about an ensuing conflict. Judging from their writings and from the few scattered articles on science in the first *Haskalah* periodical, *Hameasef*, it is manifest that the level of scientific erudition of the writers and readers was exceedingly elementary, even by the standards of their times. The articles were based on German primers for school children and were not always accurate. Such rudimentary knowledge did not qualify the *maskilim* to comprehend the more profound implications of the impact of science on the biblical view of creation.

An important cause for this enigmatic imperturbability of the *maskilim* was the prevailing equanimity in this respect in the surrounding culture, particularly in German Protestantism, which dominated the German *Aufklärung*. According to W. E. H. Lecky, "The direct antagonism between science and theology which appeared in Catholicism at the time of Copernicus and Galileo was not seriously felt in Protestantism till geologists began to impugn the Mosaic account of creation."¹

Suffice it to state that the *Haskalah* in Germany was a faint replica of the *Aufklärung*, which, in turn, exhibited the same dispassion to the relationship of scientific theories to Biblical cosmogony as did Protestantism. This calm was disturbed, however, in the nineteenth century. Steady progress in the natural sciences emboldened critics to challenge openly those views which had been held sacrosanct for centuries. Under the impact of these challenges and provocations many Christian theologians endeavored to court science as an ally rather than an adversary by ingenuously explicating the cosmology of the Bible in scientific terms.

Although, by this time, the heretofore impregnable and insular intellectual barrier had been shattered and many Jews were exposed to the scientific challenges to the Bible in general and the exposition of creation in particular, no such endeavors were made, notwithstanding the fact that similar accommodational theories had been evolved in the Middle Ages, reconciling biblical cosmology with the then prevailing Aristotelian-Ptolemaic science. The leading enlightened traditionalist exegetes, Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865) and Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888), avoided any such attempts. They were cognizant of the fact that, unlike medieval scientific theories which were merely based on speculation, modern science was empirical in nature. Aware

1. W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1891) vol. II, p. 57.

of their limitation in this area, they were determined to avoid such entanglements. Both Luzzatto and Hirsch insisted on the contrariety of the Torah and science. In the opening remarks to his commentary on the Pentateuch, Luzzatto asserts that the Bible does not aim to teach man the intricacies of science but to guide him in the path of righteousness and justice. Likewise, Hirsch insists that the Torah be studied not “to find support and corroboration for antediluvian or geological hypotheses” but as a detailed plan for an ethical life.

The only Jewish scholar who dared to venture into this unexplored minefield was Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim (1809–1879). Born in a small town in Volhynia, orphaned at the age of six, married and divorced in adolescence, he finally settled in East Prussia. Having mastered the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature, in spite of his wanderings and tribulations, he was elected Rabbi of Wreschen and, subsequently, of Kempen. Like many traditionalists of his generation, he was greatly chagrined by the rising tide of the Reform movement in Germany, particularly by the synods of the Reform leaders which met in the middle forties of the nineteenth century. Not considering himself equipped to confront his adversaries in the domain of polemics, partially due to his lack of proficiency in German, he decided on an all-comprehensive exegetical work which would serve as an adequate defense of the Torah against its critics.

Although Malbim had no scientific education and his knowledge in this domain was culled from secondary and tertiary sources, he dared to attempt to reinterpret those chapters in Genesis dealing with the process of creation in the light of modern science. Because of his limited scientific background he resorted to eclecticism, interlacing medieval ideas with modern ones, Midrashic allegories and Cabbalistic notions with scientific and pseudo-scientific theories and speculations. In retrospect, it seems that he had undertaken the impossible, yet his very endeavor was of remarkable significance, since it was a pioneering attempt to underpin Biblical cosmogony with scientific ideas. As such, it constitutes, from a historico-cultural point of view, a singular feat in presenting Jewish scientific creationism. Regardless of their empirical validity, Malbim’s reinterpretations of the following Biblical-Midrashic ideas illustrate his impressive efforts to retain the old and accept the new—a most skillful performance to be recorded in the annals of Jewish intellectual history. While nominally not a *maskil* and, in his role as rabbi in many communities he took an adversarial position to the *maskilim*, he was, nevertheless, stirred by the Enlightenment. The fact that he endeavored to validate Biblical cosmogony in scientific terms is most eloquent testimony to its influence.

Considering the dimensions of this subject and the limitations of an article, prudence and pragmatism dictated the selection of the following illustrative aspects.

Instantaneous and Sequential Creation

The hypothesis of *creatio ex nihilo*, heatedly debated for centuries by Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, had, by the nineteenth century, already become an article of faith by *consensus omnium* among traditionalist Jews. The idea that this hypothesis originated in the Vulgate's translation of an Apocryphal work² rather than in the Bible was never entertained. Maimonides' assertion that "we should perhaps have had an easier task in showing that the Scriptural passages referred to are in harmony with the theory of the eternity of the universe, if we accepted the latter, than we had in explaining the anthropomorphisms in the Bible,"³ was by then inconsequential. Equally disregarded was Halevi's remark that "the question of eternity and creation is obscure, whilst the arguments are evenly balanced",⁴ indicating that he, like Maimonides, did not ascribe to the hypothesis of *creatio ex nihilo* the importance that it assumed subsequently in traditionalist Jewish thought. Although both Halevi and Maimonides accept the Biblical view of creation in the context of *creatio ex nihilo*, neither, however, seems to have been unduly concerned by the possibility that a religious Jew might subscribe to the Greek view, alleging that the world might have originated out of a preexisting matter, since "many expressions might be found in the Bible and other writings that would confirm and support this theory."⁵

With the decline of Greek philosophy and cosmological speculation and with the advent of the Age of Faith, the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* became an article of faith that could not be challenged with impunity. As such, it required neither proof nor evidence. Its very suprarational and miraculous nature was most adequate testimony to its credibility. The fact that, to the Rabbis of the Talmud, this was not a mere hypothesis but an indisputable doctrine, made it so in the eyes of subsequent generations of traditionalist Jews. Moreover, Maimonides' assertion that, notwithstanding the inconclusive position of the Bible and contrary to the prevailing Aristotelian viewpoint, "the belief in the creation is a fundamental principle of our religion,"⁶ assuaged forever the more rationalistic elements in Jewry.

For Malbim, who wrote his extensive commentary on the Bible in the nineteenth century, *creatio ex nihilo* no longer presented a problem. Unlike his medieval predecessors, he did not consider it necessary to dwell on the subject or marshal proofs in its support. *Creatio ex nihilo* applied to time as well as to matter. The creation of time, a notion

2. *Ex nihilo facit illa Deus* (2 Maccabees VII: 28).

3. *Guide to the Perplexed*, tr. M. Friedlander (New York, 1942), vol. II, Chap. 25.

4. *The Kuzari*, tr. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York, 1964), Part I, # 67.

5. *Guide*, II, Chap. 26.

6. *Ibid.* # 13.

transcending human comprehension, had been a bone of contention among medieval scholars, notably between Gersonides and Crescas. Nevertheless, Malbim accepted the creation of time, like the creation of matter, not on rational or scientific grounds but as a confessional doctrine. Apparently, he accepted, in part, Maimonides' view that there is an intrinsic interrelatedness between time and the concept of creation. To affirm the concept of a created universe and deny the concept of creation of time would constitute a contradiction.

If you admit the existence of time before creation—Maimonides argued—you will be compelled to accept the theory of the eternity of the universe. For time is an accident and requires a substratum. You will therefore have to assume that something (beside God) existed before this universe was created, an assumption which it is our duty to oppose.⁷

The paramount problem of Malbim's concern was whether *creatio ex nihilo* was one instantaneous act in which the entire cosmos came into existence, although the particular aspects may have manifested themselves in the hebdomadal period described in Genesis, or was a sequential process that lasted six days.

On the basis of the Biblical text this question could not be resolved. The first chapter of Genesis seems to confirm the sequential supposition, while the second chapter seems to point in the direction of the instantaneous assumption. The second chapter makes no mention of a continuous hebdomadal process of creation, but seems to suggest that the feat of creation was instantaneous or, at most, lasted one day. It states: "These are the generations of the heaven and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven."⁸

The contradictory views in the Bible gave rise to similar divergent opinions in the Aggadah. Thus, the Midrash records a discussion between R. Judah and R. Nehemiah concerning the process of creation, in which the former affirms the sequential hypothesis whereas the latter favors the instantaneous one. Challenged by R. Judah's argument that the first chapter of Genesis most clearly and explicitly supports the sequential hypothesis, R. Nehemiah replied: "They were like those who gather figs, when each appears in its own time."⁹ Accordingly, God created the entire cosmos on the first day, similar to a farmer planting a crop of figs all at once, but each fig ripens and is harvested at a different time. Analogously, God created everything at once on the first day, but each particular aspect of creation assumed its preordained function on different days, as detailed in the first chapter of Genesis.

While the question whether the recorded discussion between R. Judah and R. Nehemiah was solely motivated by their exegetical differ-

7. Ibid.

8. Gen. 2: 4.

9. *Gen. Rabbah* XII: 4.

ences in probing the Biblical text or may have masked deeper and more crucial philosophical and theological issues is difficult to ascertain. It is, however, unmistakeably clear that, in the course of time and in different intellectual climates, these divergent views did conceal and reflect profound differences transcending textual and exegetical ones.

From a philosophical and theological point of view, the sequential hypothesis presented far greater problems than did the instantaneous one. To those in subsequent generations who were exposed to speculative and metaphysical thought, it seemed enigmatic that an omnipotent and omniscient God should have needed six days for the creation of the cosmos. While in ancient times, antedating abstract philosophic thought, the accomplishment of such a colossal task in six days was considered stupendous, to more sophisticated and critical men, in the course of time, it became problematic and incomprehensible.

Significantly, this problem was already alluded to in the Mishnah: "By ten sayings the world was created. And why does Scripture teach this? Could it not have been made with only one saying?"¹⁰ The reason that is given for this prolonged process is ethico-didactic rather than metaphysical. Indeed, God could have accomplished the feat of creation in one single moment or "with only one saying," but he deliberately extended it "in order to exact penalty from the wicked who destroy the world which was created by ten sayings, and to give good reward to the righteous who establish the world which was created by ten sayings."¹¹ This rationale for the sequential, rather than the instantaneous, hypothesis, apparently satisfactory in the Tannaitic era, seemed hardly as persuasive to subsequent generations, and the question became more vexing and perplexing.

Medieval Jewish scholars, like the Rabbis of the Tannaitic era, were similarly divided on the issue of instantaneous or sequential creation. Rashi, Abraham Ibn Ezra and Gersonides seem to have favored the sequential hypothesis, whereas Maimonides and Nahmanides were inclined to the instantaneous one. However, while the Tannaitic controversy revolved about the differences in the texts describing creation in the first and second chapters of Genesis, the differences between the medieval scholars stemmed primarily from grammatical and syntactical considerations.

In order to reconcile the hebdomadal process of creation with the instantaneous hypothesis, the advocates of the latter seem to echo the familiar view, expressed by R. Nehemiah, that the particular aspects of creation, although in existence from the first moment, emerged subsequently at different times. This view was clearly expressed by Nahmanides. Accordingly, at the first moment of creation two distinct

10. Aboth V: 1.

11. Ibid.

primeval substances or *hyle* came into existence out of absolute nothingness. Out of one of these *materia prima* God created the celestial realm and, out of the other, the terrestrial one.

He brought forth from total absolute nothing a very thin substance, devoid of corporeality, but having a power of potency, fit to assume form and proceed from potentiality into reality. This was the primary matter created by God; it is called by the Greeks *hyle*. After the *hyle*, He did not create anything, but He formed and made things with it, and from this *hyle* He brought everything into existence and clothed the forms and put them into a finished condition. Know that the heavens and all that is in them consists of one substance and the earth and everything that is in it consists of one substance. The Holy One, blessed be He, created these two substances from nothing; they alone were created and everything else was constructed from them.¹²

In modern times, too, the leading Biblical exegetes seem inclined to subscribe to the instantaneous hypothesis. Thus Mendelssohn, though reluctant to involve himself in any theological controversy, clearly states his position in favor of the instantaneous hypothesis. A similar view is maintained by Samuel David Luzzatto. In more recent times this view was accepted by David Hoffmann, who, though he objects to the attempts to harmonize the Bible with the theories of modern science, is, nevertheless, inclined toward the instantaneous theory of creation. Citing the controversy between R. Judah and R. Nehemiah, Hoffmann considers the latter's view more plausible and more compatible with modern thought.

Malbim's view is decidedly in favor of the instantaneous hypothesis. He basically accepts R. Nehemiah's view, as interpreted by the medieval Jewish proponents of that hypothesis. However, in the light of modern scientific thought, he feels compelled to reject some of their notions. Thus, while accepting Nahmanides' view of the instantaneous hypothesis, Malbim, at the same time, dismisses the theory of the creation of two distinct *hyle*, out of which the celestial and the terrestrial realms were fashioned respectively. Similarly, he discards the notion that the Scriptural term "heaven" refers to the instantaneous creation of the spheres which were set in motion and encompass the entire celestial domain.

According to Malbim, the concept of *hyle* is fanciful and unsubstantiated. Likewise, the supposition of spheres has no basis in reality since modern science rejects their existence. In the view of modern astronomy the planets revolve in their respective orbits in space which is permeated with a translucent aether, a view postulated by Newton. This imperceptible, subtle and elastic substance, capable of contraction and dilation is universally diffused throughout space and, being insubstantial, it could not have generated or produced the myriads of celestial

12. Nahmanides, *Genesis* 1: 1.

bodies present in the vast expanses of space. Moreover, since modern science denies the ancient theory that the planets and the stars are composed of a unique, superior, quintessential substance or a “fifth element,” known in the terrestrial domain, there was no reason for two qualitatively different aspects of creation, as maintained by Nahmanides, to have taken place.

Thus, drawing on the sources of a long Jewish tradition in support of the hypothesis of instantaneous creation and prompted by the discoveries and theories of modern science, Malbim maintains that the entire cosmos came into existence at once out of absolute nothingness and that each aspect of it unfolded and made its respective manifestation in due course of time. Notwithstanding the fact that the Bible states that the luminaries appeared on the fourth day of creation, Malbim maintains that they were created in the first moment and even revolved at once in their respective orbits. They were, however, devoid of light until the fourth day.

The Supernal and Terrestrial Realms

Although Malbim dismisses many Aristotelian views, as expressed in the *Physics*, considering them archaic, unfounded and in conflict with the findings of modern science, he subscribes, nevertheless, to Aristotle’s basic division of the cosmos into two realms: supernal and terrestrial. Qualitative differences notwithstanding, both realms came into existence simultaneously, at the first moment of creation. Paradoxically, the supernal realm, despite its vastness and sublimity, has remained complete and constant ever since, with no need for alteration, adjustment or improvement. It is the infinitely smaller realm, the terrestrial, that needed the hebdomadal process of unfoldment, during which the various aspects of nature, though created in the first moment, should assume, gradually and sequentially, their rightful place for which they were intended.

Malbim’s explanation of this paradox, however, is not grounded in Aristotelian cosmology but in religious axiology, in consonance with Jewish theology. For Aristotle, the incorruptibility and changelessness of the bodies in the celestial realm derives from their unique motion. In contradistinction to those of the terrestrial realm which move in a rectilinear manner, the celestial bodies revolve in a circular motion. “Because there can be no contrary motion to the circular, nature seems justly to have exempted from contraries the body which was to be ungenerated and indestructible. For it is in contraries that generation and decay subsist.”¹³

Although it is doubtful that Malbim ever read the aforementioned

13. Aristotle, *De Caelo* 270 a.

argument from *De Caelo*, he most certainly could not have accepted its basic assumption, the eternity of the heavenly sphere. Nor could he have accepted Aristotle's notion that the perfection of the celestial bodies is due to the fact that they were fashioned out of a "fifth element," which "without opposition and without mutation . . . stands above the strife of the elements. . . . Of it are formed the heavenly spheres and stars; it is the god-like in the realm of matter."

Malbim's objection to the eternity of the heavens was on religious grounds; his opposition to the "fifth element" notion was based on his familiarity with modern science which denied such a hypothesis. Ever since Galileo's observation of spots on the sun, the notion of the existence of a "quintessence" out of which the celestial bodies were formed and which rendered them immaculate, eternal and changeless was discarded.

Despite these objections, Malbim, as already mentioned, accepts the view that the supernal realm is sublime, perfect and unchangeable, because, to him, unlike to Aristotle, the supernal realm is not identical with the stars and planets in outer space, a subject reserved for astronomers, but with the mystical and metaphysical realm, a subject transcending human comprehension. That realm consists of pure essences which exist in *persona*, not subject to change, degeneration or disintegration. In contradistinction, the terrestrial realm exists only in *genera*, in which the individuals have no permanence, changing, disappearing and being replaced by others of the same species.¹⁴

The imperfection inherent in the terrestrial sphere is deliberate, since it is designed for human habitation. Man, being endowed with free will, which, in turn, necessitates the corollary of reward and punishment, can not live in a perfect realm where change is impossible. In such a realm no free will would be possible, since such freedom implies the choice between good and evil, the latter being inconceivable in a perfect realm. Nor could reward and punishment be meted out in such a realm, since this implies change, an impossibility in a changeless domain. Thus, it was imperative from the inception to make imperfection a basic principle upon which the terrestrial realm is founded.

This does not signify, however, that the terrestrial realm is volatile and unpredictable. Malbim is fully aware of the iron-clad laws of nature which operate universally with utmost precision. Nevertheless, to enable nature to react benevolently or malevolently to man's moral conduct there is a need for the possibility of change in its various manifestations, including decay and even death. Had the terrestrial realm been created as perfect and as changeless as the supernal one, man's violations of moral standards could not be checked.

This understandable argument leads ineluctably to a strange par-

14. Malbim, *Genesis* 1: 2.

adox: the supernal realm, due to its purity, perfection and sublimity appears to be static, whereas the terrestrial realm, due to its impurity, imperfection and propensity for sin, is dynamic.

Aware that the kabbalists and the modern astronomers affirm the existence of extraterrestrial worlds, Malbim asserts that these worlds, too, qualitative differences notwithstanding, were created in the first moment of creation. Since the Bible is not a primer for metaphysics or astronomy, it does not elaborate on these subjects. Nevertheless, it does allude to them subtly. Thus, the terms “heaven” and “earth” in the first verse of Genesis refer not only to the physical cosmos but also to the four esoteric worlds which intervene between the *En-Sof*, the ineffable appellation of Divinity, in the terminology of the kabbalists, and the physical cosmos. Each of these worlds: *Azîlut*, the world of emanation, *Berî'ah*, the world of creation, *Yeẓîrah*, the world of formation, and *Asî'yah*, the world of making, have their respective “heavens” and “earths.” The lowest “earth” of the upper world is higher than the “heaven” of the world beneath it. All of these worlds, with their respective “heavens” and “earths,” came into existence instantaneously, at the moment when the *En-Sof* decided to contract His ubiquitous essence (in Lurianic terminology: *zimzum*), and thus make room for creation. This complex esoteric doctrine is to be found tersely stated in the first verses of Genesis, without elaborations, completely escaping the eyes of the uninitiated while apparent to the masters of the kabbalah.

Similarly, the Chapter of Creation alludes to the multitudes of worlds discovered by modern scientists. Those worlds, too, came into being at the same moment as the world which man inhabits. They are, however, beyond our reach and Malbim does not venture to speculate about them.

Without delving into the mysteries of metaphysics or science, Malbim states that, at the moment of creation, all of its aspects began to function in accordance with the laws of nature which have been in operation ever since. The stars were placed in their proper orbits in which they have been revolving, although they were not set in a stellar sphere, as previously alleged. The earth, too, was set in its present position at the moment of creation and maintained there by the gravitational pull of the surrounding stars. The latter seem to exercise a force of attraction for other bodies in space, the earth included, corresponding to the degree of pitch in a musical scale. This comparison apparently echoes the ancient Pythagorean notion, as well as Kepler's mystical musings, about the “music of the spheres.”

The Primordial Light and The Celestial Luminaries

The origin and nature of the primordial light which shone during the first three days of creation, preceding the celestial luminaries—sun, moon and stars, which manifested themselves on the fourth day—had

already intrigued the Rabbis of the Talmudic era. According to R. Jacob, the nature of the primordial light was different, both quantitatively and qualitatively, from that emitted subsequently from the celestial luminaries. The Sages maintained that the very same luminaries had been in existence from the inception of creation but were not placed in their proper position until the fourth day.¹⁵

In the Amoraic period, R. Samuel ben Nahman suggested a mystic view concerning the origin of the primordial light. "The Holy One, blessed be He, enwrapped Himself in light, like a garment, and the brilliance of His splendor shone forth from one end of the universe to the other."¹⁶ Strangely, R. Samuel expressed this enigmatic and esoteric view "in a whisper," i.e. in secrecy, suggesting that this may have been an uncommon, even an unorthodox view echoing, perhaps, certain unacceptable or even heretical ideas. With Gnosticism widespread and alien and heretic opinions abounding, such speculations, even though well intentioned, were highly suspect.¹⁷

Regardless of the original meaning of these obscure homilies or ideas, light, specifically primordial light, became, in the course of time, the favorite metaphor among philosophers and theologians wishing to express the most sublime and ineffable idea—God—signifying a transcending idea that was inexpressible and even inconceivable by the human mind.

Of far greater significance was the role of primordial light in the writings of the kabbalists, who associated it with the entire complex of the metaphysical and esoteric process of emanation, irradiating from the transconceptual *En-Sof* and evolving through a host of mediating stages, or *Sefirot*, to the material world inhabited by man.

Like the philosophers, the kabbalists, too, found human language inadequate for conveying the subtle metaphysical ideas necessary in this domain. In their quest for a terminology which should approximate highly abstract metarational and metalogical thought, they considered the term "light" as least invidious, as the closest approximation for expressing the inexpressible, particularly in describing the process of emanation, bridging the chasm between the Divine and the world, and evolving the material creature from the immaterial Creator.

To Isaac Abravanel, however, the term "light," when applied to God, had an ontological significance and was not to be considered as merely metaphoric. Quoting Biblical sources in which the term light is mentioned in relation to God and referring to some of the works by Plotinus and Algazali, Abravanel concludes that, in this connection, the

15. *Hagigah* 12 a.

16. *Genesis Rabbah* III: 4.

17. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 183–185.

term is neither an analogical figure of speech nor an adjectival description of the Divine, expressing the most transcendental idea in the least material anthropomorphic term, but constitutes an approximation of the Divine essence.¹⁸

Malbim draws substantially on Abravanel's discussion on this subject from the latter's commentary on Exodus. The neo-Platonic ideas concerning the process of emanation, which became the cornerstone of the kabbalistic theory of the *Sefirot*, suggest to Malbim the actual source of the primordial light which prevailed in the universe during the first three days of creation.

The first flash of light that radiated from the Absolute Light of the *En-Sof* was too potent to be made operative, generative and creative, unless it became subdued, dimmed and channeled through an intricate and involved process of gradual occultation. Only through such a complex process in which this original pure light, emanating directly from the Divine, was filtered through modifying instrumentalities or "vessels" which made it accessible, perceptible and implementable, could this overwhelming light become operative and beneficent in the material world.

It is apparent that to Malbim, just as to Abravanel, this primordial flash of light, described in Genesis as the first act of creation, was real. Regardless of its quantitative and qualitative differences from the ordinary light known to man, the primordial light had common basic properties. Having undergone the complex process of emanation and occultation, it became the source of the physical light that was subsequently emitted by the celestial luminaries and that has brightened the world ever since. Thus, the supernal metaphysical light served as the matrix and substratum of the physical ordinary light. Were it not for the former, Malbim states, the existence of the latter and man's perception of it would have been impossible. He, therefore, interprets the Psalmist's words: "In Thy light we see light" to imply that it is the Divine light, though metaphysical and transcendental, which makes natural light possible and perceivable to man.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that while Malbim, as already mentioned, subscribes to the widely accepted concept of *creatio ex nihilo*, from a strict kabbalistic point of view, which he likewise embraces, this seems to be a misnomer, since creation, and particularly light, having emanated from the Divine essence, the source of all being, can not be considered *ex nihilo*.

Notwithstanding the metaphysical origin of light, from the moment of creation when it became operative in the world it functioned

18. Abravanel, *Exodus* XL: 34.

19. Malbim, *Psalms* XXXVI: 10.

in accordance with the laws of nature which have continued in effect from the inception of the universe.

Aware of the two major kinetic hypotheses concerning the nature of light, the emission theory and the undulatory theory, and apparently not considering himself qualified to decide as to the validity of either, Malbim cites both. The emission theory, although of great antiquity, was advocated by Newton. According to it, a luminous body sets in motion streams of minute corpuscles which impact on the eye, thus producing vision. The undulatory theory, propounded by Christian Huygens, but disproved at the end of the nineteenth century by Michaelson and Morley, suggests that a luminous source causes vibrations of waves in the ubiquitous ether which, allegedly pervades the entire universe.

Malbim believes that both, the primordial light and the light from the celestial luminaries which superseded it, can be explicated in accordance with either theory of light. Thus, according to the emission theory, it was the primordial light which set in motion streams of minute corpuscles in a manner similar to ordinary light. Likewise, primordial light might have initiated the vibrations of waves necessary to produce luminosity, according to the undulatory theory.²⁰ The primordial light existed for the first three days of creation and then its function was taken over by the celestial luminaries. The latter, although they were created at the first instant of creation, were not made operative until the fourth day.

Believing, as already pointed out, that the primordial light, despite its Divine origin and immateriality, was nonetheless real and sufficiently substantial to serve as the substratum for the light emitted by the celestial luminaries, particularly the sun, Malbim seems certain to have solved the mystery of the source of solar energy. He was apparently aware of the speculations among contemporary scientists about the source of energy which enables the sun to emit such enormous quantities throughout countless eons without being replenished. The problem of the possible exhaustibility of the sun was discussed by such prominent scientists as Mayer, Helmholtz, Lord Kelvin, and others who offered various scientific theories, without resorting to any metaphysical interpretation in their attempts to explain the continuous colossal expenditure of solar energy. To Malbim, however, the metaphysical explanation is the only valid one and the only one that adequately accounts for this enigma. Receiving its light from the eternal infinite source of light, the sun will continue to shed its light unabated for as long as God will consider it necessary.²¹

During the first three days of creation, as previously stated, the primordial light, notwithstanding its supernal metaphysical origin, op-

20. Malbim, *Genesis* I: 3.

21. *Ibid.* I: 14.

erated in the world in accordance with the well established laws that have been governing the cosmos ever since. The primordial light even conformed to the time measurement of diurnal and nocturnal alternations with which man is familiar. Contrary to those who maintained that, at the dawn of creation, the laws of nature were different from those presently in operation, Malbim emphasizes their constancy, consistency and uniformity. Nevertheless, he admits three differences between the primordial light and that emanating from the celestial luminaries: a) The primordial light was not only quantitatively but also qualitatively superior, possessing, in addition to the properties of heat and light, intellectual and spiritual propensities, alluding thereby, apparently, to the intelligences and angels that are referred to frequently in medieval philosophic and kabbalistic treatises. b) Unlike the light of the celestial luminaries, which is concentrated and localized in given luminous bodies, the primordial light was diffused throughout space. c) The primordial light illuminated the entire globe for twelve hours and was discontinued for twelve hours, whereas solar light is continuous, casting its brightness on various segments of the globe at different times.

As it was observed, the primordial light was exceedingly intense. That extraordinary heat was imperative, as will be explained subsequently, during the first three days of creation. However, when the stage was set for living organisms to emerge, that heat had to be mitigated because no life could have been sustained in such a climate. In order to enable such organisms, and eventually man, to endure and thrive, the primordial light was concealed and replaced by that of the celestial luminaries which proved to be propitious and more conducive to all forms of life.²²

Thus, on the fourth day of creation, the celestial luminaries, which had existed until then as dark bodies, assumed their proper function. In actuality, Malbim states, in our own galaxy it is the sun which began to emit light and heat whereas the other planets, including the moon, remained dark and their seeming luminosity is merely a reflection from the solar light.

Natural and Supernatural Precipitation

The reason for the creation of the primordial light, to be discontinued and replaced on the fourth day, was never adequately explained. The Rabbinic metaphor of a king who wished to erect a palace in a dark locality and was compelled to brighten the place in order to set the foundation,²³ merely explained why light had to be the first order of creation; it did not explain why that light could not have come from

22. Ibid. III: 6.

23. *Genesis Rabbah* III: 1.

the sun. For the proponents of the theory of instantaneous creation this was even more enigmatic, since, according to them, the sun as well as all of the celestial bodies came into existence at the first moment of creation. Why, then, could they not begin to function at that very moment?

Although theologically oriented, Malbim suggested a scientific explanation for this seemingly inexplicable problem. At the moment of creation, water, air, and earth—three of the four basic elements of the sublunar world, according to ancient Greek science—were comingled and existed in a gaseous state. In order to separate them out it was necessary to introduce an extraordinary, intense heat which would cause the water to evaporate, the earth particles to sink to the bottom and the air to rise. The exceptional heat of the primordial light was imperative to cause the water to become transformed into vapor. At a given altitude, where the temperature is cool, the water particles condensed and, separating from the air which they had contained, poured down in the form of torrential rains onto the earth, which was presently becoming distinct, and left thereon large bodies of water.

The point of rain formation or condensation of the water particles is presently known as *atmosphere* or, in Malbim's Hebrew equivalent, *Igul ha-Neshimah*. This is also the region of a variety of atmospheric changes and precipitation. According to Malbim, this region is termed in the Bible, *raqi'a*, usually rendered in English as *firmament*.

In view of the fact that the comingled elements existed in a gaseous state at the moment of creation, they occupied all of space; earth particles were the cause of the pervading darkness. With the process of vaporization, due to the intense heat of the primordial light and the subsequent condensation, the enormous gaseous mass became deflated, and each of the three basic elements—earth, water and air—separated and assumed their places and their proper dimensions.

Malbim maintains that without the enormous heat of the primordial light this process of separation of the elements would have taken eons to complete. Solar heat was not sufficient to bring about the radical transformations that were needed at the dawn of creation.

Although Malbim is not explicit, it is quite possible that his view about the acceleration in the developmental process of the physical aspect of the world by the primordial light, was also intended to justify the Biblical chronology of the creation. This event which, accordingly, occurred less than six thousand years, was challenged by the scientists who maintained that the world has been in existence for a few billion years. An explicit argument against the remote antiquity of the world, as advanced by modern geologists, was presented by Malbim in connection with the deluge, as described in Genesis.

The *raqi'a*, or the atmosphere, divides the region in which all meteorological changes affecting the world occur, from outer space, which

is beyond man's reach. Nevertheless, even this upper region is not altogether void. Although the vapors rising from the terrestrial bodies of water do not ascend to those altitudes, certain submicroscopic particles of water exist there *in potentio*, and, at the explicit will of God, can become transformed into rain.

At the beginning of creation, prior to the creation of the *raqi'a*, all of space was filled with particles of air saturated with water. With the emergence of the *raqi'a* through the intense thermal effect of the primordial light and electricity, the region above the *raqi'a*, which subsequently became known as the upper region, became free of water and air, making the existence of life there impossible.²⁴ From Malbim's writings it is not clear whether, in his view, the primordial light contained electricity or whether electricity was present in the basic existing elements.

It should be pointed out that Aristotle, too, had distinguished between two types of air in the sublunar region that were caused by two different "exhalations": 1) The upper part—dry; 2) the lower part—moist. This seeming parallel does not necessarily imply that Malbim was familiar with Aristotle's view on this matter, and even less that he borrowed from him.

Malbim admits that there is no scientific empirical evidence to support the existence in the upper region of any minimicroscopic water particles capable of rain *in potentio*. However, in this case he relies on the superior wisdom of the Rabbis of the Talmud, whose knowledge was incomparably greater than that of the scientists.

This contention about the existence of some water particles in the upper region, despite a lack of any scientific evidence, was prompted by two considerations:

a) According to the Bible, water, in some form, exists in the upper region above the *raqi'a*. "And God made the firmament (*raqi'a*) and it divided the waters which were under the firmament and the waters which were above the firmament (*raqi'a*), and it was so."²⁵ Indeed, the meaning of the phrase "waters which were above the firmament" seemed inscrutable to the leading medieval Jewish scholars. Thus, Maimonides considers the waters "above the firmament to be water only in name, not in reality." Nahmanides sees the waters as a mystery which the initiated must not divulge. Malbim preferred to assume their actual reality, as stated in the Bible, but in a form which cannot as yet be ascertained due to the limitations of present day science, though open for eventual discovery.

b) Notwithstanding his great admiration for the regularity and constancy of the laws of nature that operate in this world, Malbim wished to leave room for the possibility of Divine intervention and for the

24. Malbim, *Genesis* I: 7.

25. Gen. I: 7.

supernatural to occur within the domain of the natural. To exclude such a possibility would imply the limitation of God's omnipotence as well as making nature independent of God, a concept that no theistic philosophy could maintain.

The matter of rain presented a difficult problem to Malbim because, on the one hand, he was grounded in the Biblical-Talmudic theology and, on the other, he was aware of the views of the natural scientists. The Biblical phrase, "the waters which were above the firmament," seems to have enabled him to tread the thin line between these two different disciplines and to preserve, at least to his satisfaction, both viewpoints. Ordinarily, he maintains, precipitation is a natural phenomenon and is governed by precise natural laws. It is caused by the evaporation of the terrestrial bodies of water which, when subsequently cooled at the low temperatures at a given altitude—*raqi'a*—condense the aqueous particles, releasing the air and descending in the form of rain. He is, however, cognizant of the fact that in the Biblical-Talmudic outlook rain is considered a special Divine gift that is granted for man's meritorious conduct and withheld because of his contumelious acts. Precipitation, in this view, is neither natural nor automatic but strictly regulated by God in accordance with the principle of reward or punishment for obedience or disobedience to the Divine commandments. "If ye walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season.²⁶ . . . And if ye will not yet for these things hearken unto Me . . . I will make your heaven as iron and your earth as brass."²⁷ Twice daily, in addition to having it inscribed on his doorposts and on the phylacteries which he dons, every Jew recites the Deuteronomic admonition:

And it shall come to pass, if ye hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give the rain of your land in its season the former rain and the latter rain. . . . Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and ye turn aside and serve other gods and worship them; and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you and He shut up the heaven, so that there shall be no rain.²⁸

Similarly, according to the Talmud, the key of precipitation is one of the three keys held firmly and exclusively by God and not entrusted to anyone else.²⁹ Rain is withheld not only for man's major transgressions but even for minor infractions and for general moral laxity. In extreme emergencies, when human life was threatened by drought, cer-

26. Lev. XXVI: 3–4, also Deut. XXVIII: 12.

27. Lev. XXVI: 19–20; also Deut. XXVIII: 23.

28. Deut. XI: 13–17.

29. *Ta'anit* 2 a; *Sanhedrin* 113 a.

tain saintly individuals interceded and God granted rain, thus emphasizing the ethico-theological and the metaphysical source of precipitation.

It is clearly evident that this Biblical-Talmudic view which made rain so highly volatile and unpredictable could not easily be reconciled with the naturalistic view advanced by science and embraced, as already mentioned, by Malbim. To extricate himself from this constricting position, he suggests that, under certain extraordinary circumstances, it is possible for rain to fall from the nearly waterless upper region, in contravention of the natural processes operating in the lower region of the atmosphere, when it is explicitly mandated by the will of God. Thus, rain falls in the lower region in accordance with the fixed laws of nature, whereas, in the upper region, in which aqueous particles exist only *in potentio*, independent of the laws of nature, these water-potential particles may become transformed into rain.

Malbim's attempt at the harmonization of the biblical view of creation with that of science remained a singular isolated episode in Jewish intellectual history of modern times. It was not continued or emulated either by traditionalists or by the enlightened *maskilim*, although the need for such an endeavor was no less imperative in the course of time. While many factors may account for this enigmatic quiescence, the most important one was the denouement of the Jewish Enlightenment, particularly the one representing the Mendelssohnian-Wesselyan *Weltanschauung*, which advocated the reconciliation of the old with the new. Malbim's generation witnessed the bifurcation of Jewish society in the East and West and the radicalization of the traditionalist and anti-traditionalist camps. Thus, Malbim's effort of bridging the ever-widening gap between those affirming the biblical-rabbinic outlook, including the cosmological view, and those rejecting it in favor of modern science, was of little value. According to M. J. Berdiczevsky, eminent writer and critic, Malbim appeared too late to be effective. Had he been born at the time of Mendelssohn and had his monumental exegetical work been published prior to Mendelssohn's *Biur*, the subsequent evolution of Jewish thought might have followed a different course. Though he was nominally not a *maskil*, and was even an adversary of the *maskilim*, Malbim wrote in a manner that would have delighted the early harbingers of the Mendelssohnian-Wesselyan Enlightenment, since his work tended to preserve traditional Judaism and, at the same time, consider the new currents in thought and science. Addressing his generation in the terms and values of a previous one, he remained a lonely "voice in the wilderness."

Ontology, Demography, and the Silent Holocaust

ALVIN J. REINES

I

IN THE BEGINNING IS THE ONTOLOGY OF MIND.

To understand the present crisis of existence of the Jewish collectivity,¹ which I have elsewhere termed the “silent holocaust,”² and its relation to the Enlightenment with its consequent Emancipation, we must begin with an analysis of the ontology of the psyches of Jews. Such an ontological analysis of the contemporary Jewish collectivity reveals, I believe, that Jews generally possess one of two modes of perspection. A person’s mode of perspection, broadly speaking (that is, omitting details unnecessary for this discussion), is constituted of two primary elements: a self-view of the characteristics constitutive of his being;³ and a *Weltanschauung*, his view of the fundamental characteristics of extramental reality.

Among the characteristics that a person can see as constitutive of his being are autarchy or heterarchy. A person who views himself as autarchic believes that he possesses an ultimate moral right to authority over himself, to autonomy, with the consequent freedom to believe, desire and act as he chooses according to truths and values that he himself determines. A person who takes heterarchy as constitutive of his being believes that some other entity possesses ultimate authority over him with the moral right, therefore, to command how he must believe, desire, and act.⁴ Should the heterarchic person disobey his ultimate authority, he condemns himself as guilty of sin or a crime.

The second element of a person’s mode of perspection is his *Weltanschauung*. The fundamental characteristics that can constitute a *Welt-*

1. By “Jewish collectivity” I mean all persons considered to be Jews by some sizeable group of Jews who are regarded generally by other Jews as Jews. This tortuous description is required because there is no universal agreement on who is a Jew.

2. A. J. Reines, “Crisis, Polydoxy, and Survival,” in *Polydoxy: Journal of the Institute of Creative Judaism* (Cincinnati, 1978), Vol. 3.

3. I regret that there are no neuter pronouns.

4. For further discussion of autarchy and heterarchy, see A. J. Reines, “Reform Judaism: The Shock of Freedom,” in *Jews in a Free Society: Challenges and Opportunities* (Cincinnati, 1978), pp. 128ff.

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anschauung and which concern us here are two beliefs: natural providence and supernatural providence. Natural providence is the concept that that which gives existence to humans, maintains their existence, governs their fortunes and eventually causes their death is natural causation or nature. Supernatural providence states the contrary: that human existence, the quality of life of every human existent, and death are to be attributed, ultimately, to the acts of a theistic god, or some other supernatural agency. It should be noted that there are god-concepts that are consistent with natural providence, as, for example, deism, which is referred to below. Moreover, there are those who adhere to supernatural providence and believe that a theistic god created nature to govern human existence except when he chooses to interrupt its causal flow by working a miracle.

By combining the elements described above we arrive at the two modes of perspection that are central to this inquiry: autarchic-natural providence perspection (ANP perspection), and heterarchic-supernatural providence perspection (HSP perspection). ANP perspection constitutes the consciousness of a person who is his own ultimate self-authority and who believes that natural providence governs existence. HSP perspection is the consciousness of a person who affirms that an external entity possesses ultimate authority over him and that supernatural providence ultimately governs existence. My view is that those who possess these two different modes of perspection differ ontologically, that is, the natures of their psyches differ. The critical importance of this point is that a person who possesses one mode of perspection cannot change to the other at will; one is one's mode of perspection unless there is an ontological change.

It is not my intent here to judge whether one mode of perspection is superior to the other. I will, however, permit myself an observation that bears upon the gravamen of this discussion: ANP perspection emerged later in the course of evolution than did HSP perspection. No evidence exists of ANP perspection before Thales, who lived in the last half of the seventh century B.C.E., and who founded the Milesian School of philosophy. On the other hand, whatever evidence there is of the psychic workings of prehistoric humans, and certainly the written records dating from before Thales, prove that HSP perspection existed long before the seventh century B.C.E. We have no evidence of ANP perspection among Jews until the advent of medieval philosophy. Before that time, from their earliest beginnings, the Jews give evidence of possessing only HSP perspection. This consisted, basically, of belief in a theistic God who created all that exists and who possesses absolute and ultimate authority over all creatures including humans; a God who revealed commandments to all humankind, but special ones to the Jews as terms of a unique covenant with them, and who exercises supernatural providence over all creation.

Maimonides' philosophic theology was the summit of Jewish ANP expression in the Middle Ages: a person's ultimate authority is his own reason; natural providence governs human existence; and deity is the absolutely transcendent, unknowable and unrelating ground of being. The appearance of Maimonides among the Jews, with his powerful presentation of an ANP perspective religious system produced a conflict that raised a fundamental question: could the Jewish collectivity remain united if Jews were ontologically divided into two modes of perspective? The answer indicated by events after Maimonides' death (but already foreshadowed by difficulties that he experienced with Rabbinic authorities in his lifetime) was not promising. Violent conflicts erupted between the Maimonists—Jews who shared Maimonides' ANP perspective—and the anti-Maimonists, Jews who bitterly opposed it. The subsequent course of history for the Jews was such that, in time, the conflict subsided. The underlying reason for the conflict, two contrary modes of perspective, would remain. With the advent of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation, the conflict re-erupted with even greater intensity and with results so destructive and persistent that we find ourselves today in the midst of the silent holocaust—the dissolution of the Jewish collectivity and the disappearance of Jews from the Western World.

II

The term Enlightenment will be used to refer to the 18th century, when the philosophic ideas advanced in the 17th century became widespread. (Thus, the Age of Reason would include both the creativity of the 17th century and the Enlightenment.) Although a number of different philosophies are encompassed by the term Enlightenment, there is significant agreement among them on the basic concepts that are relevant to this discussion. These concepts are here designated the "Enlightenment philosophy." ANP perspective is a broad way of perceiving oneself and the world that can be expressed by a number of different philosophies (Maimonides' philosophic Judaism, as stated earlier, is one) which differ from each other in details. None is more suitable, however, for such expression than the Enlightenment philosophy, as can be seen from the following brief description of its central concepts.

1. Reason was considered by the Enlightenment philosophy as the instrument for attaining truth. (The mathematical process, particularly as employed by the natural sciences, constituted the ideal use of reason). All humans possess reason, which functions in the same way in everyone. Hence, every person can attain truth. This does not occur, however, because the functioning of reason can be impaired or destroyed by a hostile environment. Particularly ruinous to the use of reason is a person's uncritical acceptance of authoritarian religions such

as Orthodox Judaism and Roman Catholicism, which place their ostensible supernatural revelations above the demonstrated truths of the individual's reason. Thus, only an autarchic person can use reason. Moreover, reason can control the will or desire. Through this rational will, humans can bring to fruition such values taught by the Enlightenment philosophy as: the abolition of ignorance, superstition, social injustice, prejudice, the political power of authoritarian religions, and every form of tyranny.

2. Nature alone, that is, only natural providence, governs human existence. Nature is ordered and behaves uniformly according to laws. These laws are comprehensible to reason which, through the rational will, can use its understanding of them to better life. As for supernatural providence exercised through miracles, it is a fantasy and non-existent. Still, the Enlightenment philosophy's notion of Nature did not exclude a concept of deity. Many Enlightenment philosophers subscribed to deism, the view that there is a God who created the universe, but who fashioned it so that it follows natural laws which the Creator never interrupts with supernatural acts of any kind.

3. The concept of reason, in the Enlightenment philosophy, established in three ways the proposition that all humans are to be treated as fundamentally equal. The first, already mentioned, is that every person is endowed with reason, and all persons, therefore, are essentially the same. Second, as Locke stated, reason teaches that humans have a right to protect their "lives and liberty and property." Finally since reason, the essential human characteristic, is developed by education, the weighing of alternatives, and the consideration of different viewpoints, a state must allow free speech and tolerate conflicting ideas, even as regards religion.

4. The Enlightenment philosophy promulgated the concept of "progress," an optimistic view of the course that history pursues. Nature so acts that, through reason, the quality of human life inevitably advances to increasingly better and higher states.

III

The philosophy of the Enlightenment, together with the economic, political, scientific, and technological advances of the period, brought about the Emancipation, which, in turn, led to fundamental sociological changes among the Jews, in particular, dramatic demographic upheavals. The details of these changes in the Jewish collectivity have been abundantly chronicled by historians. It suffices here to enumerate those which I take as critical for understanding the contemporary Jewish condition and the silent holocaust. Jews no longer lived in politically enforced ghettos where, for all practical purposes, they were restricted to Orthodox (that is, Rabbinic) Jewish legal control of their domestic re-

lations, Orthodox religion and culture, Orthodox education, and social relations only with other Jews. Inherent in ghetto life, too, were politically imposed economic distress, disfranchisement, and persecution.

Inseparable from the Enlightenment philosophy's contribution—by its insistence upon religious, political, and economic freedom for all persons—to radical changes in the material conditions of Jewish life was its introduction to the Jews of a compelling ANP perspective ideology that repudiated HSP perspective religions such as Orthodox Judaism. To list several fundamental dogmas of Orthodoxy that were rejected by the Enlightenment philosophy (primarily on the grounds that they would require supernatural acts by the deity that interrupt natural laws, which never occurs; but also because reason has no credible evidence for their truth): the revelation to Moses and the Israelites at Sinai, and all other acts of revelation recounted in the Bible; the claim of Orthodox Jews, based on the Sinaitic revelation, to absolute authority over all other Jews, which denies them religious autonomy and declares it to be sin; and the coming of a Messiah, resurrection, and eternal life.

The compelling quality of the Enlightenment philosophy for Jews lay in its ability to provide them with credible evidence for its ANP perspective principles. The use of reason, autarchically combined with natural providence, produced scientific and technological advances that resulted in ever greater enhancement of the quality of human life—whereas miracles had not. Moreover, the rational will, together with natural providence, made possible the exodus of Jews from ghettos and had given them political freedom and economic opportunity—progress without the coming of the Messiah. The political principles of Enlightenment philosophy were concretized in positive law, sanctioning and securing religious freedom that enabled Jews to be autarchic, true to their own convictions whether they agreed with Orthodox belief or not. As the Enlightenment philosophy spread through the Western world (eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries), ANP perspective became the mode of consciousness of ever greater numbers of Jews, demonstrating that the stifling evil of the ghetto had only prevented the potentiality for ANP perspective from being realized in the psyches of Jews, but had not eradicated it.

IV

Yet, there has been a dark side to the effects of the Enlightenment philosophy on the Jewish collectivity of the Western world. (I am excluding the destiny of the Jews of Israel from this discussion, not because I believe that their situation, in the long term, will differ from that of Jews in the Western world, but on the assumption that their short term prospects require separate analysis.) The Jewish population of the Western world has declined to a point where more than one

demographer—and a Jewish philosopher such as myself⁵—believe that the Western Jewish collectivity, if it continues the status quo, particularly its religious establishments and their ideologies, is no longer a viable community. Graphically stated, this means that, for all practical purposes, a Jewish community in the Western world will no longer exist in a century or, perhaps, a few decades longer. Even the most optimistic views that can be taken seriously admit that the health of the Jewish collectivity is seriously impaired and its future survival uncertain.

The question arises: why is this the case? Why is the Jewish collectivity of the Western world disintegrating? The answer given by the establishment Jewish institutions can be broadly formulated this way. The Enlightenment philosophy, Emancipation, and environmental conditions coeval with them (political, economic, and the like,) enabled Jews to leave the ghettos and their restrictive conditions that forced them to be Jews and to behave in ways uniquely Jewish. Having thus acquired religious freedom, as well as material success and social status, the generality of Jews, of their own free choice, have, since the Emancipation, wilfully behaved in a sinful or otherwise blameworthy manner that is destroying the Jewish collectivity. In brief, the generality of Jews is itself responsible for the silent holocaust.

Among the noteworthy items in the establishment's bill of particulars against the generality of Jews are the following: Jews, in the main, do not attend the services of the establishment religious institutions, Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. They do not observe the Shabbat or other Jewish holidays (even Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are witnessing a decline in interest). They do not keep Jewish rituals and have all but abandoned the dietary laws (sporadic tokenism occurs). Particularly blameworthy is the extraordinarily high rate of intermarriage. Moreover, Jews increasingly choose to live away from established Jewish neighborhoods, threatening the viability of synagogues, Jewish centers, Jewish religious schools, and the Jewish social infrastructure. Perhaps most disastrous and certainly most ominous is that significant numbers of Jews, particularly among the young, who have left the American northeast and midwest to relocate in the sunbelt, do not reaffiliate there with Jewish institutions of any kind, religious or secular. By these and other actions of malfeasance and nonfeasance too numerous to enumerate, the generality of Jews is fueling the silent holocaust.

An essential point must here be introduced: Jewish religious institutions are critical for the survival of the western Jewish collectivity. The reason is that only a Jewish religious institution can create Jews and give to a person a sense of authentic Jewish identity. For, in the Western world, there is common agreement within the Jewish collectivity that religious institutions have the authority to prescribe the rules

5. Reference in note 2.

that determine who is a Jew, whether by birth or by conversion. (The present disagreement over the rules among the different Jewish religious communities does not change this point.) Ethnic organizations, Jewish federations, centers, and the like, have no authority to create Jews and authenticate Jews; neither is there the prospect that such authority will be given them. Moreover, no matter how ethnic institutions may eviscerate, vulgarize, and superficialize Jewish holidays, rituals, and customs, these observances are religious in origin, and owe whatever mystique and magnetism they possess in ethnic institutional usage to the aura and nuances of religion that they communicate. If this analysis is correct, as I believe, Jewish religions and religious institutions are vital to the survival of Jews in the Western world. Ethnic organizations are superstructures erected on a religious base; they cannot create and authenticate Jews, neither can they function without the subtle ambience of religion nourishing their activity.

V

In the beginning is ontology. So it is that to deal with the silent holocaust, which has been eroding the Jewish collectivity since the Enlightenment and Emancipation, we must begin with its primary cause, which is ontological. Ontology precedes demography. It is a basic and catastrophic error to believe that the reason for the silent holocaust is the willful misbehavior of the generality of Jews. If this fallacy is accepted and used to determine the nature of remedial efforts to be taken in the future, they are doomed from the start (as the history of Jewish religious institutions from the time of the Emancipation clearly demonstrates). The primary cause of the silent holocaust is that there has been a profound change in the dominant mode of consciousness of the generality of Jews, from HSP perspection to ANP perspection. Paradoxically, the Jewish collectivity which, in biblical and talmudic theology gave to the world the ideal ideological paradigm of HSP perspection, has now seen its members create preeminent expressions of ANP consciousness in the works of Einstein, Freud, Nobel laureates, and countless other scientists and thinkers. The dominance of ANP perspection among the generality of Jews is the inexorable consequence that, for them, the establishment religious institutions and their HSP-perspection ideologies are obsolete and irrelevant. It is no argument against this conclusion that many Jews do not give voice to an ANP perspection, for it is not what they say, but what they do, that reveals their true mode of consciousness.

The most succinct way to present my views on the present situation of the Jewish collectivity as it has developed in consequence of the Enlightenment and Emancipation is *seriatim*.

1. Every Jew has an ultimate right to authenticity, which means his

basic loyalty is to the beliefs, values, and practices that his mode of consciousness, whether HSP or ANP perspective, considers true and valid.

2. Hence, no Jew owes loyalty to a religious institution if such loyalty requires disloyalty to himself.

3. The establishment Jewish religious institutions serve only HSP perspective in their ideology, liturgy, values, and ritual practices. Accordingly, belonging to such institutions, let alone participating in their religious activities, is religiously either a meaningless experience or an act of disloyalty to oneself if one's mode of consciousness is ANP perspective.

4. From all appearances, the Jewish religious and ethnic establishments are generally committed to suppressing the institutionalization of Jewish religious ANP perspective. This being the case, there is no alternative for a Jew with ANP perspective but to leave Jewish religious institutional life, or even the Jewish collectivity, to pursue his own authentic course of religious action. For he has, in effect, been exiled from the Jewish institutional world. He has not failed the Jewish collectivity; it has failed him.

5. In an ANP-perspective Jewish religious institution, problems that are devastating the establishment religious institutions would not arise. For example, services would be theologically open and, in any case, services constitute only one option among many possibilities of religious experience.⁶ Similarly, intermarriage would pose no difficulties. In the first place, it would not be disapproved of by the institution, and it is the disapproval that alienates so many intermarried Jews. More important, however, is the evident truth that if someone is firmly committed to the beliefs and values of a religious institution, intermarriage is no threat to that person's commitment, for loyalty to the institution is nothing other than loyalty to one's own beliefs and values. Intermarriage, in other words, is a threat to the Jewish collectivity because the Jews involved do not believe in the establishment Jewish religious ideologies and, therefore, are compelled to follow their quest for authenticity outside of the Jewish collectivity.

6. Inasmuch as a mode of consciousness such as ANP perspective is ontological, constitutive of one's being, in an open society there is no way that attempts at indoctrination by establishment Jewish religious schools can keep a young person who has the potentiality for ANP perspective from attaining it, or from retaining it if he is already so constituted. (Only a tyrannical community that forbids as immoral acquaintance with virtually all knowledge [particularly scientific and philosophic] other than that contained in traditional Jewish sources [mainly Bible, Talmud and, for some, Kabbalah], and condemns as sin-

6. See, e.g., A. J. Reines, "Two Concepts of Shabbat: The State-of-Being Shabbat and the Seventh-Day Shabbat," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, XXXIV, No. 4 (1987): 13ff.

ful participation in, and even acquaintance with, the general [that is, non-Jewish] culture can, to any degree, be successful in preventing the emergence of ANP perspection in a young Jewish person. Would the majority of Jews in the waning years of the 20th century submit to so cloistered and dictatorial a community; do they even think that the existence of a religious community so tyrannical can be morally justified? If the ideology of a religious community cannot remain credible to its members when they have access to a free marketplace of ideas, does such a community merit survival? Accordingly, there exist two alternatives between which the Jewish collectivity can choose. One is to permit its religious institutions to continue their actual or tacit excommunication and exiling of Jews who possess ANP perspection and, thereby, condemn the Jewish collectivity to the continuing self-destruction of the silent holocaust. The other is to validate and support the institutionalization of Jewish ANP-perspection religion and religious education.

7. There is no prospect that Orthodox Jews will ever accept an ANP-perspection religious institution or community. (In fact, there is a significant degree of balkanization in the Orthodox community itself.) Therefore, what is required is the creation of a confederation of the modernist Jewish religious institutions in the collectivity, which would not only sanction, but assist, in establishing ANP-perspection Jewish religious institutions, even if, at first, this means only funding research and aiding parents and educators who wish to set up ANP-perspection religious schools.

VI

In closing, I would like to correct an impression my foregoing remarks may have given the reader. Although it may appear that I have proceeded on the basis that I believe that the Enlightenment Philosophy is entirely correct, that is not the case. Two of its concepts that are enumerated above are flawed, namely, the natural dominance of reason among human beings, and the inevitability of human progress. The power of human reason to govern human behavior, as conceived by the Enlightenment philosophy, has been shown by depth psychology and various schools of philosophy to have been vastly overstated. There is present in humans a violent irrationality that too often destroys the meaningfulness of existence for the individual person, and its force may yet erupt to destroy the species. Similarly, the notion of inevitable human progress has been demonstrated by events to have been overoptimism to the point of delusion; the Holocaust, two World Wars, global and local depressions, environmental and nuclear threats to the survival of life on the planet barely allow an attitude of even the most uncertain and minimum meliorism. Yet, my view is that, although the Enlight-

enment philosophy's concepts of reason and progress have not stood the test of time, there is a seed of truth in their notions. For if it is the case that our confidence in human rationality has been greatly shaken, it is also true that reason remains the mightiest tool which humankind possesses for realizing the good. (Freud, whose insights into the power of irrationality in humans is surpassed by no one, could offer only a method of reason to overcome the irrationality.) In like manner, though we must consign the notion of inevitable progress to the realm of fantasy and dreams, it is a truth that sufficient productive possibilities exist for human betterment so that hope and effort are called for, and not surrender to paralysis and despair. In point of fact, it is because the Enlightenment philosophy seriously misunderstood just how difficult it is for humans to attain a state of ultimate meaningful existence, and how much education and support is required from the earliest years of the individual's existence, that Jews with ANP perspection advocate so strongly the affirmation by the Jewish collectivity of ANP perspection religious institutionalization.⁷

7. A. J. Reines, *Polydoxy: Explorations in a Philosophy of Liberal Religion* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987). For a philosophy of liberal (polydox) Judaism that includes both HSP perspectionists and ANP perspectionists, pp. 13–32; for a definition of religion that encompasses both HSP perspection religion and ANP perspection religion, pp. 55ff.; for a theological explanation of the crisis of Jewish survival, pp. 185ff.

The Emancipation, the Enlightenment and the Demography of American Jewry

CHAIM I. WAXMAN

JEWS ARE A PEOPLE WITH A LONG HISTORY and a keen sense of history. Our ritual calendar is replete with days commemorating significant events in our history, and our liturgy, likewise, is replete with prayers which remind us of important events in that history. It is, therefore, somewhat ironic that we have never set aside a special day or even designed a special prayer commemorating the emancipation and the enlightenment, the onset of modernity, since their impact upon the course of Jewish history has probably been considerably greater than many of the events which are officially commemorated in Jewish liturgy and ritual. The crux of the significance of the emancipation and the enlightenment lies in the opportunities and challenges which they presented to modern Jewry. Implicitly or explicitly, they both encouraged Jews to take advantage of the opportunity to participate fully in the societies in which they found themselves, while, at the same time, challenging the Jews' ability to retain their sense of group identity.

Although a thorough analysis of their impact would require volumes, this article will review the major contemporary American Jewish demographic patterns and indicate how the challenges which these present may be traced to the emancipation and the enlightenment. Needless to say, the route was indirect, since America granted equality to Jews before the emancipation in Europe.¹ Nevertheless, it is valid to speak of such an impact since the overwhelming majority of America's Jews are descendants of those who arrived from Central Europe in the middle of the 19th century and of the far greater number who arrived from Eastern Europe between 1881–1923.²

1. Emancipation took place over a period of decades—that may be one of the (minor) reasons why it is not officially commemorated in either the ritual or liturgy—and Jacob Katz accepts the year 1781 as marking the onset of the social movement for Jewish equality in Europe. See Jacob Katz, *Emancipation and Assimilation: Studies in Modern Jewish History* (Westmead, England: Gregg International, 1972), p. 23.

2. Chaim I. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), pp. 10–31.

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Marriage

Studies of American Jewish marital patterns until the 1980s indicated that Jews had very high marriage rates, that the rates were higher than those of non-Jewish Americans and, indeed, that marriage was an almost universal norm among adult American Jews.³ When, during the latter half of the 1970s, evidence appeared of an increasing percentage of never-marrieds it was suggested that here was a consequence of the trend toward a later age of first marriage but not a real pattern of declining marriage. For example, Steven Cohen discounted the contention of the "pessimistic perspective" and argued that, "A more plausible interpretation of the recent data would conclude that young American Jewish adults may not be getting married as early as their parents did, but the vast majority are getting married."⁴

During the decade of the 1980s, however, a whole series of Jewish community surveys from cities around the country provides a serious challenge to that view and indicates a substantive change in marriage patterns. As Sylvia Barack Fishman concludes, on the basis of her analysis of 20 community studies completed during the 1980s, as well as data from the 1980 U.S. Census and the 1970 National Jewish Population Study,

the contemporary American Jewish community resembles the non-Jewish community far more than it resembles the American Jewish community of 1970. About two-thirds of today's Jews, like two-thirds of today's non-Jews, are married, compared to nearly four-fifths of Jews in 1970. The populations of Jewish singles in seven cities exceed the national average of 19 percent singles; the single Jewish populations of another six cities equal or are within four percentage points of the national average; and in no city is the contemporary percentage of Jewish singles as low as the six percent found in the NJPS in 1970.⁵

The Israeli demographers, Uziel Schmelz and Sergio DellaPergola, find this trend to be all the more serious because it has been taking place at a time when the demographic chances for marriage are higher than they had been prior to the mid-1970s. The fact that the 1980s have witnessed an increase in the proportion of never-marrieds, they contend, "supports the idea that a profound and probably enduring change is taking place."⁶

3. This and subsequent references to American Jewish family patterns prior to the 1980s are discussed in much greater detail in my previously cited book, pp. 159–183.

4. Steven M. Cohen, "Vitality and Resilience in the American Jewish Family," in Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman, eds., *The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), p. 222. This book is comprised of papers delivered at a conference in June, 1981.

5. Sylvia Barack Fishman, "The Changing American Jewish Family in the 80s," *Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 1988): 3.

6. U. O. Schmelz and Sergio DellaPergola, "Basic Trends in American Jewish Demography," in Steven Bayme, ed., *Facing the Future: Essays on Contemporary Jewish Life* (Hoboken, NJ and New York: Ktav and American Jewish Committee, 1989), p. 86.

Even if it were assumed that the 1980s findings do not confirm a growing pattern of declining marriage rates among America's Jews and are but further manifestations of a trend toward later marriage, such a rapid and large change might have serious consequences for the American Jewish population in terms of its birth rate, a variable which will be discussed below. Leaving that aside for the moment, however, there is another aspect to the consequences of even delayed marriage which will be an increasing source of stress and strain for both American Jewish families and for the American Jewish community as they cope with the growing singles phenomenon, a phenomenon the implications of which are very wide.

Briefly and not necessarily in order of priority, singles are a problem for the American Jewish community because many of its most basic institutions are family-oriented and are not, by and large, geared to accommodating single adults. To the extent that the community wishes to retain singles within its spheres of influence, it will have to devote increasing amounts of effort on programming for them. Otherwise, the singles may drift further and further from the community and its influence, one not unlikely consequence being an ever-increasing intermarriage rate, another demographic variable which will be discussed in greater detail below. As I have suggested earlier, the situation of the community's having to appeal to the needs and desires of Jews in order to attract their allegiance is a phenomenon which is the direct product of emancipation. Essentially, emancipation transformed the Jewish community from one which had the authority to impose its strictures upon its members whose very membership in the community was imposed, to a community which is of a voluntary nature and which must attract unconstrained affiliates.

Aside from the impact upon the organized communal structure and, perhaps, on the future rates of fertility and intermarriage, the growing proportion of single adults has consequences for the basic orientation of American Jewish families. American Jews have long been known as being very family-oriented and family-centered. However, as Calvin Goldscheider has pointed out,

Because young Jewish adults usually leave home for college and set up independent households of their own before they marry rather than settling near their parents and starting a family, their parents' home tends to be less family-oriented for longer periods. . . . Increasing proportions of the lives of American Jews . . . are spent in non-family-oriented and particularly non-children-oriented settings.⁷

The extent to which American Jews will remain family-oriented under these circumstances remains to be seen.

7. Calvin Goldscheider, "Family Changes and the Challenge to American Orthodoxy: The Implications of Recent Social Science Data," *Tradition*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Summer 1987): 76-77.

Divorce

As with marriage patterns, American Jewish divorce patterns increasingly appear to resemble those of non-Jewish Americans in certain basic respects. Although, on the one hand, the American Jewish divorce rate apparently remains considerably lower than that of the larger society, the rate of increase over the last two decades is similar to the rate of increase for the entire society. Goldscheider estimates the current American Jewish divorce rate to be somewhere about 15–20 percent.⁸ According to Sylvia Fishman's findings it is somewhat lower. However, even she concludes that, in most of the cities studied, the percentages of American Jews found to be divorced or separated in the 1980s was higher than the five percent found in the NJPS in 1970. Moreover, she found that, in eight of the cities studied, the Jewish rates were higher than those of the general population as reported in the 1980 national census.⁹

Precisely what the implications of this increasing divorce rate are for the future of the American Jewish community is difficult to assess at this point. Although there are very few who would argue that there are inherently positive consequences from it, it also does not appear that there are very serious negative consequences for the community as a whole. Certainly, divorce does seriously affect those immediately involved, including the children.¹⁰ It also is the major cause for the increase in single-parent families in the Jewish community, a phenomenon which continues to pose a challenge to the institutional structures of the American Jewish community.¹¹ But, the Jewish divorce rate still appears to be lower than that of the larger society, and we still do not know the consequences of the high divorce rate in the larger society. There is, however, one aspect to the increasing divorce rate which, while it may not be a demographic issue, strictly speaking, is definitely a sociological one, insofar as the growing divorce rate has certain consequences which can affect the corporate unity of American Jewry. This is a matter which will be discussed after a consideration of several other family demographic issues.

Fertility

Whereas there is little debate among demographers and sociologists of American Jewry about the trends with respect to marriage and divorce, and even where there is some disagreement there is little con-

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 72–73.

9. Fishman, *Op. cit.*, pp. 3–4.

10. Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chance: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989).

11. Chaim I. Waxman, *Single-Parent Families: A Challenge to the Jewish Community* (New York: American Jewish Committee, National Jewish Family Center, 1980).

trovery, that is not the case with respect to two other demographic features of American Jewry, fertility and intermarriage. Of the two, intermarriage is the more complex and, therefore, fertility will be discussed first.

There is little disagreement that the American Jewish birth rate is lower than the general American birth rate. What the low birth rate means for the future of the American Jewish community, however, is strongly debated and has given rise to two distinct schools of thought or perspectives on American Jewry. Briefly, they may be described as assimilationists and transformationists. Assimilationists are those who foresee the inevitable identificational assimilation of the bulk of American Jewry and, thus, the probable inability of the organized Jewish community to sustain itself in a manner similar to its present size and strength. Theirs is an essentially pessimistic perspective on the future of the American Jewish community. Transformationists, on the other hand, are much more optimistic and argue that, although the structure of the American Jewish community is changing, that change does not spell decline. In certain respects, many transformationists argue, the American Jewish community is stronger today than it has previously been and the future looks even brighter.¹²

The pessimists base their anxieties both on the demographic evidence indicating that American Jews have always had a lower than average birth rate; that the national American birth rate has been declining during the past two decades and, therefore, there is every reason to believe that the Jewish birth will continue to decline, as well; and that intermarried couples tend to have fewer children than couples in endogamous Jewish marriages and, as will be discussed below, the intermarriage rate is climbing. In addition, studies of the fertility expectations of women in their childbearing years, conducted in the 1970s, indicated that although there was a decline in the gap between the expectations of Jewish and non-Jewish women, Jewish women still expected to have few children. Accordingly, Sidney Goldstein projected that, "in the absence of a drastic reversal in ongoing patterns, a decline seems probable."¹³ While rejecting as exaggerated Elihu Bergman's predictions of an American Jewish population of, at best, less than one million by the year 2076,¹⁴ Goldstein suggests that it would probably be accurate to predict a population of between 3–4 million American Jews by the end of the 21st century.

12. For the essence of the arguments between the assimilationists and the transformationists, see the essays by Nathan Glazer, Steven Cohen, and Charles Liebman in Steven Bayme, ed., *Facing the Future*.

13. Sidney Goldstein, "Jews in the United States: Perspectives from Demography," *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 81, 1981, p. 9.

14. Elihu Bergman, "The American Jewish Population Erosion," *Midstream*, Vol. 23, No. 8 (October 1977): 9–19.

Two years later, Schmelz and DellaPergola wrote a more detailed demographic analysis in which their projections were not quite as pessimistic. They presented 8 different possible scenarios, none of which would spell imminent doom for the American Jewish community. However, even they did see a population decline, ranging from about 5.2 million in the worst case, to about 5.6 in the best.¹⁵

The issue of the birth rate has relevance not only in terms of the size of the American Jewish population; it also has implications for its median age, and this is a related concern for those who see declining birth rates. American Jews have a higher median age level than does the total American population. They have a greater proportion of elderly, i.e., 65 years and older, and of those in later middle age. These trends are likely to continue as the birth rate continues to remain low, it is argued, with severe economic and social implications for both the American Jewish population and for the resources and policies of its organized communal structure. To many, these trends place a large question mark on the future of the organized community's ability to maintain the levels and quality of activities and services that it has provided until now.

Until recently, the only response offered by those who were not particularly distressed by the evidence of a declining American Jewish population was that what counts is quality, not quantity. The non-pessimists argued that Jews were always a numerically small people, relatively, and that the quality of Jewish life is much more important than its quantity. Jewish couples may be having fewer children but, in doing so, they are able to provide much more quality to the lives of those children than they would if they had more. The leaders of the organized American Jewish community, they said, should pay much more attention to the quality of Jewish communal life and cease worrying—as if they were, indeed, worried—about its quantity. To claims such as this, some, like Milton Himmelfarb, responded that without quantity there would be no quality to talk about.

A very different and, indeed, revisionist response was sketched out in 1984, and was presented more systematically in 1986, in the work of two of the major proponents of the new transformationist perspective, Calvin Goldscheider and Steven Cohen. According to them there is no question of either quality or quantity. They argue that even in quantitative terms there is no reason to believe that there will be any significant decline in the American Jewish population. In contrast to the analyses of previous data which indicated that there would be a decline in the rate of marriage among Jews, especially among Jewish women, and that they would have fewer children, Cohen and Gold-

15. U. O. Schmelz and Sergio DellaPergola, "The Demographic Consequences of U.S. Jewish Population Trends," *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 83, 1983, pp. 141–187.

scheider argue that their work indicates that Jewish women are, in fact, simply marrying later and delaying childbearing, but, finally, are having an average of 2.1 children, which is replacement level. Even in quantitative terms, therefore, the future seems relatively stable.¹⁶

Since birth rates are notoriously difficult to predict, most of the pessimists remain unconvinced. The problem, however, for them is that they are also unable to present any convincing viable policy recommendations to encourage American Jewish couples to have more children. There is no evidence that warnings by religious and other communal leaders have any impact because, apparently, most couples do not base their childbearing decisions upon what is deemed to be good for the community. Rather, they seem to base those decisions upon what they see as appropriate for themselves and their own offspring.

Nor do community-sponsored economic incentives, like tuition fee reductions in Jewish schools for those with a higher-than-average number of children, seem to have any impact. In fact, the evidence from cross-national studies on birth rates indicates an almost universal inverse relationship between GNP level and birth rate and, also, that within societies there is an inverse relationship between socioeconomic status and birth rate. Nor have the pro-natalist social policies of various Western European countries, Canada, and Israel, been able to reduce that inverse relationship. It would thus appear that all that the pessimists can do is hope that the revisionists will be proven correct and that the American Jewish birth rate will actually remain stable.

Intermarriage

With respect to intermarriage, one empirical matter upon which there is consensus is that its rate has risen sharply during the past quarter of a century. Until the early 1960s, American Jews were characterized as an overwhelmingly endogamous group, that is, the vast majority of Jews married Jews. Since then, while precise data are, for a variety of reasons, difficult to obtain, the available evidence suggests that, nationally, approximately 30 percent of all Jews who marry, marry non-Jews.¹⁷ However, this figure is deceptive because it obscures wide regional variations. For example, the intermarriage rate is lower in the Greater New York City area than it is in Los Angeles, and it is highest in Denver, where it reaches well over 50 percent.¹⁸ Even with these

16. "Jews, More or Less: An Interview with Steven M. Cohen and Calvin Goldscheider," *Moment*, Vol. 9, No. 9 (September 1984): 41–46.

17. It is important to note that this is the more acceptable way of calculating the intermarriage rate. Obviously, if one calculates the intermarriage rate based upon the total number of marriages in which Jews participate as spouses, the rate would be much higher. Some of the confusion deriving from the reporting of conflicting rate may be due to differences in the manner in which the various rate are calculated.

18. Bruce A. Phillips, "Factors Associated with Intermarriage in the Western United States," paper presented at the 9th World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, July 1985.

variables in mind, what the increase in the intermarriage rate means, both quantitatively and qualitatively, is the crux of the disagreement.

There are two basically different types of intermarriage, namely, mixed and conversionary, which have, apparently, very different consequences. In the former, the non-Jewish spouse remains non-Jewish, whereas in the latter, the originally non-Jewish spouse converts to Judaism. The available evidence strongly suggests that the levels of Jewish ritual practice are substantially higher in conversionary Jewish households than in mixed marriage households.¹⁹ However, we do not have the longitudinal studies which are necessary to determine the future Jewish identification of the children of even conversionary intermarried couples.²⁰ Neither do we have in-depth qualitative studies which are necessary to determine the impact of having both Jewish and non-Jewish relatives, like grandparents, uncles, aunts, and first cousins, upon children of even conversionary intermarried couples. We do not know how having non-Jewish close relatives affects their own sense of Jewish identity, nor do we know whether, in the future, they will continue to identify as Jews. After all, the fact that half of the family of a child of an intermarried couple is not Jewish gives that child an option which is unavailable to the child of an endogamous couple. The child of the intermarried couple, therefore, has a much greater degree of freedom to choose not to identify as a Jew. To what extent such children will exercise that option remains to be seen.

From a strictly demographic perspective, the impact of intermarriage is largely dependent upon the proportion of conversionary marriages among all intermarriages. This is so because all of the available data indicate that it is extremely rare for American Jews overtly to leave the Jewish group. Apostacy, in which case the Jew converts to another religion, appears to be virtually non-existent, and even cases of defection from the Jewish population without joining another religion are statistically insignificant. However, as Schmelz and DellaPergola point out, the data may be biased because they inherently omit those ex-Jewish men and, probably even more commonly, women who live in non-Jewish neighborhoods, behave in non-Jewish ways, or in other ways manage to evade the researchers who are conducting population studies for Jewish communal organizations.²¹

Assuming that, in any case, the rate of defection from the Jewish population is low, intermarriage need not spell decline if there is a high

19. Steven Hübner, *New Jews: The Dynamics of Religious Conversion* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1979).

20. For some preliminary exploration of this issue, see Egon Mayer, *Children of Intermarriage: A Study in Patterns of Identification and Family Life* (New York: American Jewish Committee, Institute of Human Relations, 1983); and Egon Mayer, *Love & Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians* (New York: Plenum, 1985).

21. Schmelz and DellaPergola, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

rate of conversion to Judaism. If a large proportion of the formerly non-Jewish spouses convert to Judaism, not only is there no inevitable demographic loss; there may well be a gain. Some transformationists, like Goldscheider, convey the general impression "that the level of conversion to Judaism has increased and significant numbers of intermarried couples, usually over 50 percent, raise their children as Jews."²² Charles Silberman argues even more strongly that intermarriage does not pose a threat to Jewish continuity and strongly argues that, "If half the children of intermarriages are raised as Jews, there will be no net reduction in the number of Jews, no matter how high the intermarriage rate is"²³ He, too, argues that the evidence indicates an increasing tendency for intermarried couples to raise their children as Jews.

With respect to Goldscheider's assertion of an increasing level of conversion, however, a number of recent studies paint a rather different picture and indicate that not only is the conversion rate not increasing; it is decreasing. For example, in Greater Los Angeles, the second largest Jewish population center, not only in the United States but in the world, Neil Sandberg found that mixed marriages outnumber conversionary marriages among all Jewish intermarriages by three-to-one.²⁴ The rate of mixed marriage increases by generation, from 11.6 percent among first generation American Jews to 43.5 percent among those in the fourth generation.²⁵ Both types of intermarriages are related to religious affiliation, with the rates varying from 8.3 percent for the Orthodox, 20 percent for the Conservative, 37.7 percent for Reform, to a high of 66.7 percent for the unaffiliated of the fourth generation.²⁶ In addition, Sandberg found a higher rate of intermarriage in remarriages.²⁷ Given the rising divorce and remarriage rates, it is likely that the intermarriage rates will rise even higher.

Sandberg's is not the only recent study to find such patterns. Bruce Phillips' studies of Jewish communities on the West Coast also found that the proportion of mixed marriages among all intermarriages is rising rather than declining, as Goldscheider suggests.²⁸ In Denver, for example, the percentage of intermarried households rises from 53 percent among those ages 30–39 to 72 percent among those ages 18–29, and the percentage of conversionary households among the intermar-

22. Calvin Goldscheider, *Jewish Continuity and Change* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 11.

23. Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York: Summit Books, 1985), p. 303.

24. Neil C. Sandberg, *Jewish Life in Los Angeles* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), p. 53.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, p. 56. Significantly, 55.1 percent of the Jews in Los Angeles report that they do not belong to any Jewish religious or to any Jewish communal institution.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

28. Bruce A. Phillips, *Border Cities*, forthcoming.

ried households decreases from 25 percent among those ages 30–39 to 9 percent among those ages 18–29. Similar patterns were also found in Phoenix, with the percentage of intermarried households increasing from 43 percent to 72 percent and the percentage of conversionary households among intermarried households decreasing from 40 percent to 16.6 percent between the 30–39 and 18–29 age cohorts.²⁹

Nor are such patterns limited to the West Coast. Although the percentages are definitely smaller, similar patterns manifest themselves in the East as well. For example, in Philadelphia, the percentage of intermarried households there increases from 27 percent among those aged 30–39 to 38 percent among those aged 18–29, and the percentage of conversionary households among intermarried households decreases from 16 percent among the 30–39 years olds to 12 percent among those in the 18–29 year old group.³⁰ Even in New York, which has one of the lowest intermarriage rates in the country, fewer than 25 percent of the non-Jewish spouses in those intermarriages converted to Judaism.³¹ If patterns such as these are characteristic of the national American Jewish trends, there is a sound basis for questioning the optimism of the transformationists.

On the other hand, as the transformationists point out, intermarriage is not an isolated variable. The extent to which it is indicative of the decline of the community is also related to the community's response to it. Until recently, it was accepted as axiomatic that Jews who intermarry have rejected the Jewish community and that their intermarriage is the final step in leaving that community. The transformationists argue that this is most frequently not the case. Conditions have changed, they claim, and many, if not most, of those who intermarry do so for reasons unrelated to their feelings about being Jewish or the Jewish community. They marry for love or other reasons and, at the time of their marriage, they do not consider their Jewishness to be a problem. It is only later, usually when they have children, that the Jewish issue arises. When it does, they frequently find that the Jewish community is unwilling to accept them. Their subsequent alienation, so the reasoning goes, is, therefore, not of their own doing. As Goldscheider points out, on the basis of his analysis of studies of the Boston Jewish community, "No ideological basis for intermarriage was uncovered which favors out-marriages among Jews, nor is there any evidence that intermarriage reflects values emphasizing assimilation. Younger Jews in their late teens and early twenties see little connection between intermarriage

29. Ibid.; Bruce A. Phillips and William S. Aron, *The Greater Phoenix Jewish Population Study, 1983–84* (Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix, 1984).

30. William L. Yancey and Ira Goldstein, *The Jewish Population of the Greater Philadelphia Area* (Federation of Jewish Agencies of Greater Philadelphia, 1984).

31. Steven M. Cohen and Paul Ritterband, "Intermarriage: Rates, Background, and Consequences for Jewish Identification," mimeographed, 1985.

and total assimilation.”³² If alienation from the Jewish community does occur, it is a consequence of the Jewish community’s unwillingness to accept the couples.

Both the reality of the sharp rise in intermarriage and this new perspective on its social psychology have sparked major policy changes within the organized American Jewish community. It is, today, extremely rare to find the traditional Jewish rites of mourning being observed by the families of those who intermarry. The only organized communal refusal to accept intermarriage is that of the relatively small Syrian Jewish community which has a firm policy prohibiting any conversion, no matter how sincere the particular individual involved might be, so that no member of that community even thinks that his or her intermarriage might ever be accepted. Aside from this rare exception, no similar explicit organized communal action exists. All of the religious branches of American Judaism have, to one degree or another, adopted a stance which David Singer has called “living with intermarriage,”³³ and it is the inevitable consequence of Emancipation and Enlightenment. It is, apparently, impossible to enjoy relative equality in all other realms within a non-Jewish society and yet remain “a people apart” solely with respect to marriage patterns. Indeed, from a purely empirical perspective it could be argued that the prevalence of intermarriage in which neither spouse is compelled to deny the group of origin is a very good indication of the degree to which there is, indeed, equality in the society. Thus, in terms of the goals of Emancipation, intermarriage is a measure of its success.

Reform Judaism has taken the most explicit and dramatic steps in policy changes. It was the first to adopt a proposal to embark on a major outreach campaign to encourage the conversion of the non-Jewish spouses among intermarried couples. While no such *de jure* formal policy has been adopted by either Conservative or Orthodox Judaism, several Conservative and Modern Orthodox rabbis have recently written articles urging that traditional Judaism change its stance from one which discourages toward one which encourages conversion. Increasingly, however, it is *de facto* policy of most Conservative and Orthodox rabbis to encourage conversion among mixed marriage couples.

The second major step of Reform Judaism in this regard was the adoption of a new criterion, at least in terms of the last two-thousand years, of determining Jewish status. Whereas traditional Judaism has historically defined a Jew as one born of a Jewish mother or one who converted to Judaism, Reform Judaism’s policy of patrilineal descent now recognizes as a Jew the child of either a Jewish mother or a Jewish

32. Goldscheider, *Op. cit.*, p. 172.

33. David Singer, “Living with Intermarriage,” *Commentary*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (July 1979), 48–53.

father, providing that the child wishes to be so recognized. The objective of this new policy is to keep the children of the intermarried within the community. Although there has been staunch criticism of this policy of patrilineal descent from both the Conservative and Orthodox rabbinic bodies, in addition to some dissent from within the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform) itself, there has been no major joint effort to rescind it, and the whole issue has largely vanished from the organizational agendas of those rabbinic organizations. But, it has not been entirely ignored. Indeed, it was a central element in the "Who is a Jew?" controversy which played such a major role in the Israeli elections of 1988 and which polarized much of American Judaism. This aspect of the issue pertains to Halakhah, traditional religious law, and is not a strictly demographic matter. It is, however, a major one in the sociology of the American Jewish community. To no small degree, the origins of this issue may be traced to the emancipation and enlightenment since the challenges of modernity fostered the development of denominationalism within Judaism and the claim, by at least one of the denominations, to religious legitimacy even though it does not accept the authority of Halakhah.³⁴

In brief, there are two issues related to the trends mentioned previously which are of serious concern to the religiously-traditional (Orthodox and traditional Conservative) rabbinic leadership, and both have to do with standards for which the patterns of other American ethnic groups are irrelevant, namely, Halakhah. The first involves the issue of divorce and the fact that the traditionalists will not recognize the validity of Jewish divorces which do not conform with Halakhah. This entails not only a religio-political struggle between rabbis of different persuasions; it has the potential for very grave consequences for Jewish communal life because it means that members of one segment of the community, the religiously-traditionalist, will not be able to marry an increasing number, given the rising rates of divorce and remarriage of American Jews, of those from the non-traditionalist segment of the community. Thus, in 1986, a number of concerned traditionalist rabbis put forth novel proposals for joint rabbinic courts to which the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform would adhere but in which none would dominate.³⁵ Thus far, these proposals have not been warmly received in either the traditional or the non-traditional communities and their chances of being operationalized seem remote, at best.

The other issue also derives from the fact that Halakhah is the standard for the religiously-traditional, while it is not so for others, and it manifests itself with respect to intermarriage. While, for the reli-

34. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

35. For example, Norman Lamm, "Seventy Faces," *Moment*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (June 1986): 23-27.

giously-traditional, a Jew is someone who was born of a Jewish mother or has undergone a proper religious conversion, that is, in accordance with dictates of Halakhah, most Reform rabbis do not convert according to Halakhah and, as was discussed earlier, they also accept patrilineal descent as a criterion for determining status as a Jew. Here, too, this means that religiously-traditional Jews will not recognize the Jewish status of an increasing number, given the growing intermarriage rate, of those who are part of the religiously non-traditionalist community. To the traditionalists, these kinds of unprecedented schisms in the Jewish community are, indeed, cataclysmic. Nor should it be assumed that it is only for a small group of traditionalists that these are problems. On the substance of the issues there is no disagreement between the Modern, Sectarian, and Hasidic Orthodox, and the Traditional Conservative. Rather, the only difference is in approach. Most of the Sectarian and Hasidic Orthodox are fatalistic and have signed off, more or less, those who are not Orthodox. In fact, their perception of this development is a major component of the Sectarian and Hasidic Orthodox antagonism to the cultural consequence of emancipation and the enlightenment, modernity. Although the Modern Orthodox and Traditional Conservative welcome not only political and social Emancipation but modernity as a whole, they do not automatically welcome all of its consequences, nor are they prepared to accept them passively. They see an impending cataclysm in the current schisms and are attempting to prevent it. In any case, these are issues which have major consequences for the future of the American Jewish community.

Education

The trend of very high levels of general education for America's Jews continues unabated. Thus, a much greater proportion of Jewish men and women complete at least four years of university education than does the general American population. For example, in the early 1980s Cohen and Ritterband found that whereas approximately 16 percent of all Americans age 25 and above did so, 57 percent of Jewish men and 48 percent of Jewish women did.³⁶ Moreover, the New York figures are underrepresentative of those for the larger American Jewish population. In Denver, for example, the rates are much higher, with 74 percent of Jewish men and 62 percent of Jewish women over the age of 18 having at least been graduated from college.³⁷ Given these levels of education, it seems very reasonable to assume that the occupational and income levels of America's Jews are rising accordingly.

36. Paul Ritterband and Steven M. Cohen, "The Social Characteristics of the New York Area Jewish Community," p. iv-8, mimeographed, 1982.

37. Bruce A. Phillips and Eleanore P. Judd, *The Denver Jewish Population Study* (Denver: Allied Jewish Federation, 1982), pp. 72-73.

Migration

One of the major traditional sources of growth for American Jewry was immigration. Since the post-Holocaust arrival of the remnants of Eastern European Jewry, however, there has been a low level of Jewish migration to this country. At the present time, it may be anticipated that there will be two probable sources of such immigration, both of which are complicated by ideological issues on the communal planning level, Israel and the Soviet Union.

It is estimated that there are some 500,000 Israeli Jews in the United States and, given the economic, military and political conditions in Israel, their numbers will probably continue to rise. Although evidence from Israelis in New York suggests that they remain separate from the American Jewish community,³⁸ indications from other cities, like Los Angeles, indicates that they and their children will ultimately become integrated into that community and, thus, they may be perceived as a source of small growth.³⁹ Nor are their numbers offset by any emigration of American Jews. The only such emigration is of *olim* to Israel, and the annual number of American *olim* is fewer than 2,000.⁴⁰

The only foreseeable source of significant Jewish immigration to the United States is from the Soviet Union. The present Soviet policy of *glasnost* has given rise to a widespread anticipation of the arrival of many thousands of Soviet Jews in the near future. Obviously, it is much too early to gauge the accuracy of this anticipation, let alone the impact of such an influx, but American Jewish communal organizations are gearing up for it. How successful they will be in coping with it remains to be seen. If past experience is any indication, the results will be largely favorable, although not without considerable headaches.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most that can be said at this point in evaluating the impact of the Enlightenment and the Emancipation upon the demography of American Jewry is that it has been a mixed blessing. In the United States in particular, Jews have experienced unprecedented freedom and equality. At the same time, these have given rise to unprecedented new challenges. In the final analysis, the impact is still unfolding and no one can be confident about what the future holds in store.

38. Moshe Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances: Israeli Emigrants in New York* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988).

39. The as-yet unpublished findings of Pini Herman, whose doctoral dissertation is a study of Israelis in Los Angeles, indicate that Israeli Jews there are much more involved in the larger Jewish community.

40. Chaim I. Waxman, *American Aliya: Portrait of an Innovative Migration Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

The Ambivalent Legacy: The Impact of Enlightenment and Emancipation on Zionism

VICKI CARON

FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF EUROPEAN JEWS, the 19th century was, above all, the century of emancipation. Jewish elites in both Eastern and Western Europe firmly believed that, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, history was inevitably moving toward the triumph of liberalism and, concomitantly, emancipation. To be sure, emancipation was not won overnight, and the pace at which Jews acquired their rights of citizenship varied enormously.¹ While these discrepancies indicated the persistence of anti-Jewish resistance, emancipation nevertheless made steady and sure headway. Once won, Jews believed, these rights of citizenship could not be revoked, for to do so would run counter to the tide of history. Even in Eastern Europe by the mid-19th century, progress seemed inevitable. Czar Alexander II's Era of Great Reforms (1856–1866), which alleviated many anti-Jewish disabilities, seemed to prove that even the most oppressive and anti-Semitic of regimes would ultimately adopt a Western model of constitutional democracy, including the granting of Jewish civil rights.

The rise of political and racial anti-Semitic movements at the end of the 19th century seriously challenged, for the first time, the deeply embedded faith of Western Jews in liberalism and emancipation. Less than a decade after the granting of emancipation in Germany, the first organized anti-Semitic party emerged on the scene, the Christian Social Party, led by Adolph Stöcker, chaplain to the Imperial court. Stöcker's lead was soon followed by a number of even more virulent, racially inspired anti-Semitic parties.² In Austria, Georg von Schönerer initiated

1. France granted full emancipation in 1791; Germany in 1871; Austria-Hungary in 1867; Italy in 1870; and Russia only in 1917.

2. On anti-Semitic parties and movements in Imperial Germany see Peter G. J. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (New York, 1964), pp. 75–126, 189–288; George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York, 1964); Paul Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction* (New York, 1949); Richard Levy, *The Downfall of the Antisemitic Political Parties in Imperial Germany* (New Haven, Conn., 1975); Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Antisemitism, 1700–1933* (Cambridge Mass., 1980), pp. 260–272.

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the Pan German Movement in 1882, predicated, in large measure, on the notion that Jews, culturally and racially alien, could never be members of the German Volk. And, in Vienna, Karl Lueger led his Christian Social Party to victory in the 1895 mayoral elections, despite the opposition of the Imperial government, on a platform heavily infused with anti-Semitism.³ The reforms of Alexander II in Russia, too, proved shortlived, and soon gave way to an upsurge of xenophobic Slavic nationalism, which culminated in the violent anti-Jewish pogroms that swept the Pale of Settlement in 1881.⁴ Even in France, universally considered the most liberal and enlightened nation with respect to its Jews, emancipation came under attack during the Dreyfus Affair, which unleashed an anti-Semitic movement of unprecedented scope and virulence.⁵ No longer could Jews dismiss anti-Semitism as a mere vestige of the barbaric past; nor could they continue to believe that it was simply a matter of prejudice—wrong-headed ideas—which would be eliminated through more enlightened and rational education. Rather, it increasingly appeared that anti-Semitism was deeply rooted in the present, linked to the socioeconomic, political and cultural crises of modernization.

Jews responded to the advent of political anti-Semitism in a variety of ways, most of which did not call into question the fundamental assumptions of emancipation and assimilation. The dominant responses of Western and Central European Jews were either continued reliance on liberal movements, as was the case in France, or the creation of specifically Jewish self-defense organizations, such as the *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* (the Central Union of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith), established in 1893. Both these responses, while acknowledging the reality of anti-Semitism and the need to formulate more activist strategies to fight against it, nevertheless reaf-

3. Indeed, the opposition of the Imperial government was so strong that Lueger had to wait two more years for his election to be confirmed. On Austrian anti-Semitism see Pulzer, pp. 127–188, 189–288; John K. Boyer, “Karl Lueger and the Viennese Jews,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, vol. 26, 1981, pp. 125–141; Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna* (Chicago, 1981); Robert S. Wistrich, “Karl Lueger and the Ambiguities of Viennese Antisemitism,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. XLV (Summer–Fall 1983): 251–261; Carl E. Schorske, “Politics in a New Key: An Austrian Trio,” in Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1981), pp. 116–180; Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, pp. 281–91.

4. Louis Greenberg, *The Jews in Russia*, 2 vols. in one (New York, 1976); Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (New York, 1984), pp. 27–49; Howard M. Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (New York, 1958), pp. 181–219, 240–260.

5. Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism* (New York, 1951); Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair: The Case of Alfred Dreyfus*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York, 1986); Stephen Wilson, *Ideology and Experience, Antisemitism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Rutherford, N.J., 1982); Michael R. Marrus, “Popular Anti-Semitism,” in *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt (Berkeley, CA, 1987), pp. 50–61.

firmed the faith of Jews in emancipation—the belief that they could be successfully integrated into European society.⁶

In Eastern Europe, mass emigration to the West of at least two-and-one-half million Jews was the primary response to the dashed hopes for political reform and economic betterment. The emergence of a Jewish Socialist movement in 1897, the General Jewish Workers' Union in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, commonly known as the Bund, was another attempt to address these same problems.⁷ Yet, neither emigration nor Jewish socialism seriously challenged the viability of assimilation. While those who opted to leave the Russian empire had, to be sure, abandoned hope in an improved future there, they certainly had not given up the expectation that emancipation would be realized in their new homes in the West. By the same token, even the Bund, which rejected the notion that emancipation could be achieved through a steady advance of liberalism, nevertheless continued to maintain that, as a result of the inevitable victory of the socialist revolution in Russia, Jews would ultimately acquire political rights there. Hence, although these responses to anti-Semitism in both Eastern and Western Europe modified certain aspects of the ideology of emancipation, the essential premise of that ideology remained intact.

The only Jewish response to anti-Semitism which seriously challenged the fundamental propositions of emancipation was Zionism. Although individual Zionist ideologists had begun to articulate their views as early as the 1830s,⁸ it was only at the end of the 19th century, in reaction to the rise of political anti-Semitism, that Zionism began to take root among significant sectors of the Jewish population. The creation of the World Zionist Organization in 1897, largely a result of the indefatigable efforts of Theodor Herzl, provided the necessary momen-

6. On the response of German Jews to anti-Semitism in the late 19th century see Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870–1914* (New York, 1972); Sanford Ragins, *Jewish Responses to Antisemitism in Germany, 1870–1914: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1980); Marjorie Lamberti, *Jewish Activism in Imperial Germany: The Struggle for Civil Equality* (New Haven, CT., 1978); Jehuda Reinharz, *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1975); Arnold Paucker, "The Jewish Defense against Antisemitism in Germany, 1893–1933," in Jehuda Reinharz, ed., *Living with Antisemitism: Modern Jewish Responses* (Hanover, NH, 1987), pp. 104–132. On French Jewry see especially Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation* (Oxford, 1971); Wilson, pp. 692–730. For a good overview of the historiography of French and German responses to anti-Semitism see Marrus, "European Jewry and the Politics of Assimilation: Assessment and Reassessment," *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 49, no. 1 (March 1977): 89–109.

7. On the Bund see Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (New York, 1981), pp. 171–287; Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale* (New York, 1970); Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia from its Origins to 1905* (Stanford, CA, 1972).

8. The Zionist writings of Yehuda Alkalai (1798–1878) appeared as early as the 1830s. See Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea* (New York, 1970), pp. 103–107.

tum. Although Zionism never became the ideology of the majority of Jews, either in Western or Eastern Europe, its radical reinterpretation of the "Jewish Question" made it a force which could not be ignored.

Zionism, from the start, depicted itself to be the antithesis of emancipation. It offered an assessment of anti-Semitism diametrically at odds with that of assimilationist Jews;⁹ it challenged as ineffectual the political strategies that they devised to fight anti-Semitism; and, perhaps most significantly, it contested their definition of what it meant to be a Jew in the modern world. Yet, Zionism's relationship to emancipation was not as clear-cut as its projected self-image suggested. In reality, Zionism owed far more to emancipation and the assimilationist ideologies that emancipation spawned than it ever publicly acknowledged. As Arthur Hertzberg has astutely noted:

Zionism is the heir of immediate predecessors as surely as it is their foe; it is the attempt to achieve the consummation of the freedom the modern world promised the Jew as clearly as it is the symbol of the blasting of that hope; it is the drive of Jewry to be part of society in general as much as, or even more than, it is the call to retreat; and it is the demand for a more complete involvement in modern culture, at least as much as it is a reassertion of the claim of older, more traditional loyalties.¹⁰

Thus, only by understanding not only those elements of assimilationist ideologies which Zionism rejected, but also those that it adopted and transformed, can we fully comprehend the place of Zionism among the major post-emancipation ideologies and movements of 19th- and 20th-century Jewry.

In what ways, then, did Zionism directly challenge the fundamental premises of emancipation? First, it offered an assessment of anti-Semitism diametrically opposed to that of assimilationist Jews. Although, by the end of the 19th century, most Jews had abandoned their extraordinary optimism regarding the inevitable demise of anti-Semitism in the near future, the majority continued to believe that it could be combatted effectively. Nor did they ever seriously entertain the possibility that emancipation might actually be overturned. Faith in law and the good

9. The use of the term "assimilation" here requires some qualification. Although the term often carries negative connotations, suggesting the willful abandonment of one's identity and heritage, the vast majority of 19th-century Western Jews understood assimilation to be a process which would enable them to integrate into the general society while retaining some sort of Jewish identity. In this paper, I will be using the term "assimilation" in this neutral sense to refer to both acculturation and integration. For further discussions of this topic see Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York, 1964), pp. 65–73; Stephen M. Poppel, *Zionism in Germany, 1897–1933: The Shaping of a Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 12–13; Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914* (Albany, NY, 1983), pp. 3–4; and Paula E. Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906–1939* (New York, 1979), pp. 6–8.

10. Hertzberg, introduction to *The Zionist Idea*, p. 21.

will of central governments remained the mainstay of the political comportment of modern Western Jewry.

Zionists saw anti-Semitism as inevitable, however, and, as such, they assessed the prospects of Jewish existence in Europe as bleak. Leo Pinsker saw anti-Semitism as a disease haunting Europe—the hatred and fear felt by non-Jews toward a ghost people—an alien minority, which, unlike all other peoples, lacked a territory. Other Zionists attributed the intractability of anti-Semitism to the inherent and permanent racial antagonism between Jews and non-Jews. With uncanny prescience, Moses Hess articulated this thesis as early as 1862, well before the emergence of full-blown racism: “The Germans hate the religion of the Jews less than they hate their race—they hate the peculiar faith of the Jews less than their peculiar noses.”¹¹

Ever more strident economic competition between Jews and non-Jews was another factor which impelled Zionist thinkers to maintain that capitalism had not brought an end to anti-Semitism, but, in fact, had raised it to a new level. In *The Jewish State* (1896), Herzl declared: “For in the ghetto we had remarkably developed into a bourgeois people and we emerged from the ghetto a prodigious rival to the middle class.” “Hence,” he concluded, “we are certain to suffer acutely in the struggle between the classes, because we stand in the most exposed position in both the capitalist and the socialist camps.”¹² The Socialist Zionist leader, Nahman Syrkin, similarly took account of this strife: “While class interests in general caused the war on the Jews, the middle class was the most strongly affected because, in the general competitive struggle, it suffered most from Jewish competition.”¹³ Even emigration to other countries in the diaspora could not solve the problem, for, as Ber Borochov and others insisted, “the Jewish problem migrates with the Jews.”¹⁴ Integration was thus impossible; the only solution to the “Jewish Question” was the creation of an independent Jewish homeland.

Zionists also took issue with the political strategies of assimilationist Jews, a trend that was not surprising in light of their far more pessimistic assessment of anti-Semitism. For most of the 19th century, Western and Central European Jews widely accepted the notion that, in the post-emancipation era, Jews were no longer to have collective political interests. In part, this notion arose from the belief that anti-Semitism, to the extent that it still survived, would necessarily disappear in time. But even more importantly, Jews surmised that such activities would have been illegitimate in the eyes of their non-Jewish neighbors. Indeed, emancipation was predicated on the expectation that Jews, once granted the rights of citizenship, would divest themselves of their me-

11. Cited in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 120.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 216, 218.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 363. For Herzl's very similar views see, *Ibid.*, p. 209.

dieval corporate character. As Clermont-Tonnerre, one of the leading pro-emancipation spokesmen at the time of the French Revolution declared: "To the Jews as individuals—everything; to the Jews as a group—nothing. They must constitute neither a body politic nor an order; they must be citizens individually."¹⁵ Until the last quarter of the 19th century, therefore, the only political organizations that Jews created were intended to fight anti-Semitism not at home, but abroad—in the Near East, North Africa, or Eastern Europe. With regard to fighting anti-Jewish prejudice at home, Western Jews felt wholly confident that they could rely on non-Jewish liberal defenders.¹⁶

Only with the rise of political anti-Semitism did Jews, at least in Germany, begin to create self-defense organizations specifically aimed at combatting anti-Semitism in their own country. Yet, the advent of organizations like the *Centralverein* by no means signified that Jews were now acting entirely on their own. *Centralverein* leaders knew full well that their activities would be doomed to failure without the continued support of major liberal parties.¹⁷ Their strategy, aimed at rallying this liberal support, was always to demonstrate that anti-Semitism posed a threat not only to Jews, but to constitutional democracy at large.

Zionists adamantly challenged the emancipation ideology of political neutrality. Reliance on non-Jewish spokesmen, they argued, was cowardly and ineffectual. The rise of political anti-Semitic parties and movements had made it all too clear that Jews did, indeed, share collective political interests. Moreover, Zionists held, events had shown that non-Jewish allies were frequently undependable. Just as in the mid-19th century Moses Hess had castigated his socialist colleagues for their indifference toward the sufferings of the Jews, so, too, did East European Zionists like Pinsker and Syrkin express profound disillusionment with the utter lack of response to the pogroms from their so-called allies on the left, whether liberals or socialists. It was only through what Pinsker called auto-emancipation—Jews taking their fate into their own hands—that they would win those freedoms which emancipation had promised but failed to deliver.

Finally, Zionists sharply contested the whole gamut of assimilationist definitions of what it meant to be a Jew in the modern world. Sensitive to the perennial charge that they constituted a "state within a state" and aware that, according to the terms of emancipation, they were ex-

15. Cited in Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews: The Origins of Modern Antisemitism* (New York, 1970), pp. 360–61.

16. The major European Jewish organization dedicated to fighting anti-Semitism abroad in the 19th century was the *Alliance israélite universelle*, created in France in 1860. On the ideology of political neutrality see especially Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation*, passim; Hyman, pp. 8–11; Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions*, esp. pp. 53–116.

17. On the alliance between the *Centralverein* and German left-liberals in Imperial Germany see especially Lamberti.

pected to abandon their corporate identity, assimilationist Jews of all schools—ranging from radical Reform to neo-Orthodox—felt compelled to redefine Judaism as a religious creed, stripped of any elements which might be construed as national or political.¹⁸ Those aspects of Talmudic law which conflicted with the civil law of the countries where emancipation was becoming a reality would now have to be modified. The role of the rabbi who, in traditional Jewish society, performed both civic and religious functions, would also have to be narrowed exclusively to the religious realm. Finally, messianism itself would have to be depoliticized and reconceptualized in universal terms. No longer could Jews await a distinctively Jewish messiah to bring about the restoration of a Jewish polity in Palestine, for to persist in this belief would only reinforce the anti-emancipation claim that the loyalty of Jews to their new homelands was only skin-deep. In response, the Reform movement in 1845 went so far as to eliminate from the prayerbook “all petitions for our return to the land of our fathers and for the restoration of a Jewish state.”¹⁹ By depoliticizing Judaism and relegating it entirely to the private sphere—religion—assimilationist Jews hoped to prove that, with respect to nationality, they could be just as French, British, or German as their non-Jewish compatriots.

Zionism obviously rejected the assimilationist notion that Judaism was simply a religious creed. Historically, Zionists argued, Judaism had always been more than a faith; rather, it had been a living vibrant national culture, of which religion was but one component. Zionist critics like Moses Hess, Aḥad Ha-Am (Asher Zvi Ginsberg), and Martin Buber severely chastized assimilationist Jews for betraying their national heritage and for creating a dessicated Judaism—a dry, abstract idea divorced from its true living spirit, the element of Jewish peoplehood. Zionists concurred fully with racial anti-Semites that nationality, including Jewish nationality, was not a matter of personal choice; rather, it was an indelible aspect of one’s identity from birth, whether acknowledged or not. Religion made little difference; even a baptized Jew or an atheist remained a member of the Jewish nation. As the Zionist publicist, Jacob Klatzkin, declared: “To be a Jew means the acceptance of neither a religious nor an ethical creed. We are neither a denomination nor a school of thought, but members of one family, bearers of a com-

18. It could be argued that adherents of the Positive Historical School of Judaism, led by Zacharias Frankel, were far less inclined to accept the definition of Judaism as a creed, stripped of all national components. Nevertheless, even these Jewish spokesmen stopped short of a full-fledged affirmation of Jewish nationalism. On Frankel see Louis Ginzberg, *Students, Scholars and Saints* (Philadelphia, PA, 1943), pp. 195–215; Ismar Schorsch, “Zacharias Fränkel and the European Origins of Conservative Judaism,” *JUDAISM*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 344–354.

19. David Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York, 1907), p. 254.

mon history.”²⁰ To the profound dismay of assimilationist Western Jews, Zionists affirmed the anti-Semitic allegation that Jews did, indeed, constitute an alien nation, a “state within a state,” but they sought to infuse this accusation with new positive meaning, transforming it into the banner of their revolutionary movement.

On the level of public discourse, therefore, Zionism clearly rejected a good deal of the ideology of emancipation and assimilation. Nevertheless, if one scratches beneath the surface, it quickly becomes apparent that Zionism unconsciously owed a substantial debt to its supposed arch-rival, socially as well as intellectually. First, in sociological terms, even a brief perusal of the biographies of the leading figures in the Zionist movement reveals an astonishing trend—the overwhelming majority of them, even in Eastern Europe, came from highly assimilated backgrounds. In Western Europe especially, Zionism became the primary vehicle for the return to Judaism of many among the younger generation who felt alienated from the assimilationist ideologies of their parents, which they condemned as hypocritical and vacuous. As Moses Hess so poignantly declared in *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862): “After twenty years of estrangement I have returned to my people.”²¹ Stephen Poppel has well illustrated that the entire younger generation of German Zionists who became active around the turn of the century and took over the leadership of the German Zionist Federation on the eve of the First World War—Kurt Blumenfeld, Richard Lichtheim, Robert Weltsch, and others—came from the most highly assimilated crust of German Jewry. Having grown up with the belief that they were first and foremost German, it came as a profound shock to them when, during their student days at the universities, anti-Semites brandished the accusation that they would remain forever alien to the German *Volks*. Thus denuded of their German identity and deprived of any substantial Jewish identity, these youths experienced a profound crisis, a *Kulturkonflikt*, as Blumenfeld termed it. For these youths, who were groping toward a reaffirmation of their Jewish identity in response to anti-Semitism, Zionism offered an extremely attractive solution to their dilemma precisely because it put forth a radical critique of both anti-Semitism and emancipation and assimilation.²²

Even in Eastern Europe, Zionists were overwhelmingly recruited from among the most assimilated and westernized elements of Jewish

20. Cited in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, p. 317. Similarly, Herzl proclaimed: “We are one people—our enemies have made us one whether we will [it] or not . . .” *Ibid.*, p. 220.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

22. Stephen M. Poppel, *Zionism in Germany*; Shaul Esh, “Kurt Blumenfeld on the Modern Jew and Zionism,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, vol. 6, no. 2 (December 1964): 232–42.

society—individuals like Pinsker, Moshe Leib Lilienblum and Peretz Smolenskin who, prior to the pogroms, had been the most ardent advocates of Haskalah—Jewish Enlightenment—and the greatest believers in the possibility of emancipation.²³ That many Russian Zionists had lived for at least some time in Odessa, Russia's major gateway to the West which harbored one of the Empire's least tradition bound and most enlightened Jewish communities, is thus not surprising.²⁴ As was true of their counterparts in the West, it was the profound shock experienced when the idealistic expectations of these Jews crashed head-on against the bedrock of anti-Semitism—the 1881 pogroms—that sealed their conversion to Zionism. Hertzberg is correct when he notes that secularization was a necessary prerequisite for the rise of Zionism, but secularization in and of itself was not enough.²⁵ Rather, it was the tremendous chasm between the expectations for emancipation brought on by secularization, on the one hand, and the stark reality of anti-Semitism, on the other, that generated the *Kulturkonflikt* which culminated in Zionism.

In ideological terms, too, Zionism owed much to the legacy of emancipation. One could, indeed, argue that both assimilationist ideologies and Zionism represented secularized forms of Jewish messianism. Both expressed profound weariness with *galut*, the condition of exile. True, they differed significantly over what measures could effectively bring an end to this calamitous state. For assimilationist Jews, emancipation was the remedy. With the granting of civil and political liberties, Jews would at last achieve that long sought after security—freedom from the constant fear of expulsion: France, England, or Germany would become their “New Jerusalems,” their “Promised Lands.” Zionists similarly sought to end *galut*, but obviously rejected emancipation as the solution. Only a Jewish homeland, a territory of their own, could usher in the messianic era and provide true security from anti-Semitic persecution. Still, despite this difference, the secularized messianism of both assimilationists and Zionists shared a common assumption which set them off from their traditional coreligionists: both maintained that redemption was not only imminent, but that this redemption would come about as a result of human, not divine, efforts. No longer would Jews have to wait passively for the coming of the messiah. According to assimilationists and Zionists alike, it was now at least partially

23. See J. Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, pp. 49–132; David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (New York, 1976), pp. 65–108; Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York, 1972), pp. 56–83; Sachar, pp. 199–220, 261–69; Hertzberg, intro. to *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 40–45.

24. On the Jewish community of Odessa prior to the pogroms see Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794–1881* (Stanford, CA, 1985).

25. Hertzberg, intro. to *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 15–114.

up to Jews themselves to initiate that era which each believed would be the last of Jewish history.²⁶

Perhaps the most important element that Zionism borrowed from emancipation is the ideology of Jewish regeneration: the notion that Jews, in order to be integrated into the modern nation state, would have to be radically remade.²⁷ As the Enlightenment debates over emancipation demonstrate, European intellectuals were generally agreed that Jews at the time were culturally, religiously, and economically degenerate. Even Enlightenment spokesmen who favored emancipation, like Christian Wilhelm von Dohm or the Abbé Grégoire, expected Jews to undergo a thoroughgoing self-transformation in return for the generous gift of civil and political liberties. Specifically, Jews were called upon to give up those aspects of Talmudic law which might conflict with the performance of civic duties, especially military service. They were also expected to relinquish that aspect of their messianic tradition which looked forward to the restoration of a Jewish political state in their Biblical homeland. Yiddish, too, was to be abandoned, since it reinforced Jewish segregation, preventing Jews from fraternizing with their Christian countrymen. Finally, Enlightenment *philosophes* called upon Jews to reform their economic behavior radically; they were to set aside their “parasitical” and “unproductive” occupations, especially money-lending and petty commerce, in order to become “useful” and “productive” citizens, artisans and farmers. Emancipation, Salo Baron has argued, was an implicit contract between the Jews and the State.²⁸ Even where it was granted unconditionally, as in France, there was no question that it could be revoked if the anticipated reforms failed to materialize.²⁹

Jews were being put to the test—they were being asked to prove themselves worthy of citizenship. Sensitive to these pressures and eager for the opportunity to integrate into European society, late 18th- and early 19th-century Jewish elites internalized much of this Enlightenment critique of Jews and Judaism. In turn, they called upon their co-religionists to make the requisite changes. Indeed, at the core of all assimilationist ideologies was the demand for Jewish regeneration, self-reformation. Thus, *Maskilim* (adherents of Jewish enlightenment) and

26. On the secularization of the messianic idea by the Zionist movement see Hertzberg, intro. to *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 17–19.

27. On the ideology of “regeneration” see especially Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, pp. 249–368; Vicki Caron, *Between France and Germany: The Jews of Alsace-Lorraine, 1871–1918* (Stanford, CA, 1988), pp. 1–44; Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), pp. 57–103.

28. Salo W. Baron, *Modern Nationalism and Religion* (New York, 1947), pp. 219–220; “Newer Approaches to Jewish Emancipation,” *Diogenes* (Spring 1960): 56–81.

29. Phyllis Cohen Albert, “Ethnicity and Jewish Solidarity in Nineteenth-Century France,” in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, eds. Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski (Durham, NC., 1982), pp. 249–274.

Reformers alike excoriated the use of Yiddish. In the eyes of the greatest advocate of Haskalah, Moses Mendelssohn, Yiddish was “a language of stammerers, corrupt and deformed, repulsive to those who are able to speak in a correct and elegant manner.” Later in the 19th century, the Jewish historian, Heinrich Graetz, forbade the translation of his writings into Yiddish “jargon,” which he deplored as the Jews’ “greatest shame.”³⁰ Only European languages, or purified Hebrew, were suitable for a people who wanted to stake their claim to the heritage of Western culture.

Moreover, Jewish enlightenment reformers in both France and Germany agreed with the physiocratic critique of Jewish economic practices and strove, as a result, to encourage their constituencies to give up moneylending and petty commerce. Indeed, a major element of most early reform programs was the establishment of vocational schools where children of the Jewish poor would learn the new trades of artisanry and farming.³¹

A thoroughgoing attack on the religious foundations of Rabbinic Judaism was another central component of this program. Jewish enlightenment spokesmen, as well as adherents of Reform, saw the long period of Rabbinic Judaism as one of cultural and religious stagnation. The Babylonian Talmud, these Reformers argued, once fixed in the 6th century, ceased to be a living and creative force. Although Hala-khah, or Jewish law, may have provided consolation to Jews shunted away behind ghetto walls, it was no longer relevant to the very different problems of Jews in the age of emancipation. Either it would have to be discarded altogether, as the most extreme proponents of change argued, or it would have to be reformed so that it could once again adapt to the radically changed circumstances of modern Jewish existence.

This negative evaluation of Rabbinic Judaism found further expression in the newly emerging discipline of Jewish history as practiced by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* or Science of Judaism movement.³² Although by no means a monolithic group, the majority of *Wissenschaft* scholars looked back to the Biblical age and the period of the Second Temple as the most creative eras of Jewish history. By emphasizing these periods, Jews eager for integration could highlight that they shared with their Christian compatriots a tradition central to the de-

30. Both cited in Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1987), p. 150.

31. For discussions of these schools see Patrick Girard, *Les Juifs de France de 1789 à 1860: de l'émancipation à l'égalité* (Paris, 1976), p. 119; Phyllis Cohen Albert, *The Modernization of French Jewry: Consistory and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Hanover, NH, 1977), p. 136; Adolph Kober, “Emancipation’s Impact on Education and Vocational Training of German Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies* (2 parts), vol. 16 (1954): 3–32, 151–68.

32. See Schorsch, intro. to Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, trans., ed., and introduced by Ismar Schorsch (New York, 1975), pp. 1–62.

velopment of Western culture—in particular, the idea of monotheism which, they claimed, was brought to full flower by the Hebrew prophets. In the eyes of these enlightened Jewish reformers, the Middle Ages came to be associated with the ghetto and *galut*; it was a period in which constant anti-Jewish persecutions had broken the creative Jewish spirit and turned Jews inward upon themselves. Now, however, as a result of emancipation, Jews had embarked upon a new stage of history. They would reenter the mainstream of Western civilization and once again, as in Biblical times, become active and creative participants in the formulation of that culture.

Zionists borrowed this ideology of regeneration lock, stock and barrel. They, too, that believed Jewish life in *galut* was distorted and unhealthy, but they extended *galut* to cover the period of emancipation as well. Moreover, they echoed assimilationist demands for a thoroughgoing regeneration and normalization of Jewish character and life, but, in marked contrast to the assimilationists, they argued that this transformation could occur not in the Diaspora as result of emancipation, but only in the new territorial homeland of the Jews. As Aaron David Gordon proclaimed:

What we seek to establish in Palestine is a new, recreated Jewish people . . . not a continuation of Diaspora Jewish life in a new form. Every one of us, (he stressed), is required to refashion himself so that the Galut Jew within him becomes a truly emancipated Jew.³³

Nahman Syrkin similarly declared:

The Jew is small, ugly, servile, and debased when he forgets and denies his great character. He becomes distinguished and beautiful in the moral and social realms when he returns to his true nature.³⁴

If Jews were to enter the world, whether through emancipation or through Zionism, they would have to do so as radically refashioned Jews—Jews who had broken entirely with their *galut* past.³⁵

Even the symptoms of the diseased character of Jewish life in *galut* were identically diagnosed. Zionists followed the assimilationist lead in castigating the use of Yiddish. In the future Jewish state, Herzl proclaimed, “We shall give up using those miserable stunted jargons, those ghetto languages. . . .”³⁶ Ahad Ha-Am, too, scathingly belittled the Autonomist movement which called for Jewish minority rights within

33. Cited in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 377, 382.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

35. For an excellent analysis of the way in which the Zionist movement internalized the Enlightenment critique of Jews and Judaism see Yehezkel Kaufman’s 1934 essay, “The Ruin of the Soul,” in Michael Selzer, ed., *Zionism Reconsidered: The Rejection of Jewish Normalcy* (London, 1970), pp. 117–129.

36. Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, tr. by Sylvia d’ Avigdor, rev. by Israel Cohen and again by Jacob M. Alkow, ed. (New York: Mt. Scopus Publishing Co., 1946), p. 146.

the Diaspora: "For them our national culture means Yiddish literature, national education means speaking Yiddish and the national ideal is to reach the level of nations like the Letts or the Slovaks, which have not as yet made any contributions whatever to the general stock of human culture."³⁷ Hebrew literature, Hebrew culture, Hebrew nationalism, precisely because they were untainted by *galut*, were to provide the foundation stones of the new Jewish society.

Zionists also agreed fully with their assimilationist predecessors that the occupational structure of Jews in *galut*—their overconcentration in commercial professions—was abnormal, unhealthy, and "parasitical." Socialists Zionists like Hess, Syrkin and Borochoy looked forward to the establishment of Jews on their own national territory as the sole opportunity to normalize their economic behavior and create a true Jewish proletariat. The more romantically inclined called for the creation of an authentic Jewish peasantry—the return of Jews to the national soil.

Only by making Labor, for its own sake, our national ideal (argued A. D. Gordon), shall we be able to cure ourselves of the plague that has affected us for many generations and mend the rent between ourselves and Nature.³⁸

Martin Buber similarly maintained that "our character is distorted in many ways, that we are out of joint, and expect the new life in our own land, the bond to the soil and to work, to set us straight and make us whole once more."³⁹ Even Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem's Ashkenazi community after World War I, believed that spiritual redemption would have to be accompanied by "a physical return which will create healthy flesh and blood, strong and well-formed bodies, and a fiery spirit encased in powerful muscles."⁴⁰ Although Herzl himself ridiculed this notion of transforming Jews into peasants as out of sync with the modern world,⁴¹ he, too, clearly expected Zionism to diminish the overabundance of stock jobbers and "mediocre intellects."

Finally, Zionists borrowed the devastating critique of Rabbinic Judaism first put forth by assimilationist Jews. Despite the not infrequent claim of Zionists that they represented the continuation of Jewish tradition, it was not the tradition of Talmudic Judaism to which they referred; rather it was that same Biblical tradition so extolled by the Haskalah and Reform movements. Although he disdained their methods, Moses Hess proclaimed that he shared the goal of the enlighteners: "to open the Jewish scene to the light of modern culture by piercing the hard shell with which rabbinism had armored Judaism." Only then, Hess

37. Cited in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, p. 274.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 374.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 457.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 431.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

predicted, could “the rigid forms of orthodoxy . . . relax and become creative again.”⁴² Buber, too, echoing the attacks of the Reformers, condemned orthodoxy as stifling and petrified. He traced his own intellectual lineage not to Rabbinic Judaism, but, rather, to those who rebelled against it: the early Christians, Spinoza, or the Hasidic master, the Baal Shem Tov.⁴³ Aḥad Ha-Am was, perhaps, religious orthodoxy’s sharpest Zionist critic:

But a “people of the book,” unlike a normal people, is a slave to the book. It has surrendered its whole soul to the written word. The book ceases to be what it should be, a source of ever-new inspiration and moral strength; on the contrary, its function in life is to weaken and finally to crush all spontaneity of action and emotion, till men become wholly dependent on the written word and incapable of responding to any stimulus in nature or in human life without its permission and approval.⁴⁴

Aḥad Ha-Am, Hess and Buber knew full well that they were not the first to proclaim this desire to liberate Judaism’s moral spirit from the petrified encasement of Halakhah. Indeed, this had also been the goal of their archenemy, the Reform Movement. Even Aḥad Ha-Am’s famous dichotomy between priests and prophets, the former representing narrow-minded legalists and political materialists, and the latter, the noble moral spirit of Judaism, harked directly back to Reform roots.

Finally, Zionism even borrowed the central goal of emancipation: the drive for assimilation and integration. To be sure, Zionists sharply rejected the whole concept of the assimilation of individual Jewish citizens into European society and culture as both impossible and degrading. Nevertheless, Zionists never abandoned the aspiration to become part of the modern world. If Jews could not achieve emancipation as individuals, they nonetheless could do so as members of a Jewish nation. Despite its increasingly pessimistic appraisal of non-Jewish society in light of the rising anti-Semitism, Zionism never called upon Jews to withdraw from that world, to retreat to the ghetto. Rather, Zionists hoped that the creation of a Jewish homeland in which Jews would be “regenerated,” culturally, politically, economically and spiritually, would open up new possibilities for their participation in Western culture. Jews as a nation would reenter the stage of world history, and thus contribute not only to the survival of Jews and Judaism, but to the betterment of all humankind. Like his predecessor, Hess, Herzl foresaw Zionism as an ascent to an even higher level of civilization. Despite the failure of liberalism in Europe, he envisioned the creation of a Jewish state which would be the last outpost of liberal values—a beacon of enlightenment unto the world. Similarly, for socialist Zionists, the creation of socialism in Palestine would benefit not only Jews, but the whole of

42. Ibid., p. 123.

43. See Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York, 1972), passim.

44. Cited in Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, p. 252.

humanity. By creating the first truly egalitarian society, Jews would initiate a general process of humanizing the world, eliminating the scars of exploitation and alienation. By the same token, for spiritual Zionists like Buber, Kook and Gordon, Zionism's aim was to create a new humanistic ethos based on the prophetic values of peace and brotherhood, values which would radiate out from the Jewish homeland to the rest of mankind. Not only Jews, but Judaism itself, desired to leave the ghetto once and for all, insisted Aḥad Ha-Am. The creation of a vibrant cultural center in Palestine would allow Jews to interact confidently with the modern world without being absorbed by it. Only then, he believed, would the Jewish people "shake off its inertia, regain direct contact with the actualities of life, and yet remain the Jewish people."⁴⁵

Thus, despite important differences, assimilationists and Zionists shared a common goal: the liberation of Jews and Judaism from the ghetto—a liberation which would allow Jews to participate fully in the modern world without losing their distinctive Jewish identity. They agreed that Jews and Judaism as they existed in ghetto times were corrupt and debased. Only a thoroughgoing "regeneration" could cure the people and their religion and prepare them for readmission to the center stage of world history. To be sure, the pragmatic programs put forth by assimilationists and Zionists for achieving these ends differed radically. Indeed, one would not be incorrect in arguing that, in terms of its far more pessimistic assessment of anti-Semitism as well as its more activist strategy for fighting that prejudice, Zionism marked a veritable revolution against the principles of emancipation. Nevertheless, even among Zionists, integration, not segregation, remained the desired goal. This powerful drive for integration, albeit on the national rather than the individual plane, is one of the most enduring, though least acknowledged, of the often contradictory legacies that emancipation and enlightenment bequeathed to their Zionist heir.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Early Responses to the Emancipation in Hebrew Haskalah Literature

ISAAC BARZILAY

IN HIS *DIBREI SHALOM VE'EMET* (WORDS OF Peace and Truth, 1782), Naftali Herz Wessely (1725–1805), the poet laureate of the Berlin Haskalah literature, pointed out, *inter alia*, the need “to compose new books about beliefs and opinions . . . in order to teach [the youngsters] wisdom and ethics.” Such teachings, he noted, cannot be directly derived from the Torah. He also suggested that such books be written in Hebrew and translated into German; the students would thereby be doubly rewarded: they would, at the same time, learn both Hebrew and German (Chap. 6; see also *Mikhtab Sheni*, p. 36).

It is quite possible that Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), the mentor of the *maskilim*, may have arrived at this very idea independently some years earlier. In a *Lesebuch für jüdische Kinder*, first published in Berlin by David Friedländer in 1779,¹ one finds among the six included compositions of Mendelssohn two of the kind which subsequently became basic to the catechism literature of the time: 1) “*Grund-Artikel des Judenthums nach Rabbi Mosche Majemousohn*” (“Principles of Judaism according to R. Moses Maimonides”) (pp. 12–13), and 2) “*Die Zehn Gebote*” (“The Ten Commandments”), (pp. 13–15). It may be of interest to note here the twelfth article of Maimonides, as translated by Mendelssohn:

I consider it as true and certain, that not for ever will the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remain distant from the Promised Land and scattered among the nations. At a certain time, which is known only to Him, God will awaken an anointed head from the House of David, who will again transform this people into a free nation and He will reign over it in the land of their forefathers (pp. 12–13).

As we shall presently see, this article of faith, with only slight variations, appears in most catechisms of the time.

The earliest response in Hebrew to the emancipatory trends in relation to the Jews, which began to stir public opinion in Germany in the last decades of the 18th century, was Isaac Satanow's *Dibrei Riboth* (Joseph Klausner dates its appearance to the year 1793).² Following the

1. *Lesebuch für jüdische Kinder mit den Beiträgen Moses Mendelssohns, herausgegeben von David Friedländer. Wieder aufgefunden und mit einer Einleitung versehen von Moritz Stern*, (Berlin, 1927).

2. *Historiah shel Ha-Sifrut Ha'Ibrit Ha-Hadashah* (Jerusalem, 1930), p. 149, n. 4.

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pattern of the 16th century book of polemics, *Shebet Yehudah*, by Shlomo Ibn Verga,³ Satanow convened in his work a small group of Christian and Jewish notables, who, in the presence of a king, discuss the Jewish problem in Christian Europe of the 18th century: the causes of their disabilities and how to overcome them. The views expressed here indicate the influence of Mendelssohn's young friend, Christian Wilhelm Von Dohm (1751–1820) and his epoch making work, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (Berlin, 1781, 1783). They also reiterate Satanow's own views, expressed in his other works. Thus, he is critical of the Jews' pursuit of usury, but praises agriculture and manual crafts. He does not believe, however, that contemporary Jews are ready to become active in agriculture, manual work or the military service. He dwells at length on the need to reform their education and submits a detailed project for it. As far as the economic rehabilitation of Jewry is concerned, he suggests that the Jews be divided into three classes. The first would consist of scholars, scientists and those in the free professions, who would be exempt from all taxes. The second would consist of craftsmen and merchants, who would pay taxes just like Christians of the same class.

The third class would consist of agriculturists who would cultivate the land: plough, sow and harvest it. Some would be gardeners and vintners, or miners of iron, copper, zinc or lead. The poor among them would be given by the king a horse and a cow, and at the end of three years they would repay the loan. The people of this class would pay no taxes, but only to the landlord on whose land they would be settled. They would have to work for him one day a week. Only the third generation would serve in the army, but nothing should be required of them that may make them transgress their religious laws. In time of peace they should be free from work for the king on the Sabbath and holidays, but in time of war they would be under obligation to perform the work like anyone [else].⁴

In time, Satanow assumes, the Jews would also participate, on an equal basis with Christians, in the administration of the state and the municipal offices.

Though, formally, *Dibrei Riboth* is not a catechism, it is close to that literary genre and, as mentioned, was, in all likelihood, written under the impact of the early emancipation trends. It is not an impressive project, accepting, as its author does, the premise of the opponents of immediate Jewish emancipation. Satanow thinks that the Jews must first be rehabilitated, a process which may take several generations. Far worse, socially it is a reactionary project, degrading the Jews to the status of serfs, simply enslaving them—partially at least—to the landowners. On the other hand, the plan is not without some merit, since it points out

3. Annotated and commented upon by Azriel Shoḥet, edited and introduced by Yiṣḥaq Baer (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik), 1947.

4. *Sefer Dibrei Riboth* (Constantina), p. 48 a.

that Jewish disabilities and defects were not the fault of the Jews themselves but of the Christian bias against them and the many restrictions that were imposed on their activities. Thus, the burden of the solution, Satanow implies, must not be carried by the Jews alone, but by the Christians as well.

It may be assumed that it was, to a great extent, as a result of Wessely's *Words of Peace and Truth* that the catechism genre became a dominant feature of the Haskalah literature in Germany. In the course of some twenty years a number of such works appeared. The first one, to my knowledge, was Herz Homberg's *Imrei Shefer* (1802, 1807, 1816), which consists of two parts, the first dealing with the duties of the individual toward God, and the second with his duties toward his fellow-men, the state, the king and society at large. In the first part, Homberg describes Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith and the Ten Commandments. Interesting is the description of the 12th article, that of the Messianic belief:

Not for ever will the seed of Abraham be scattered like sheep without a shepherd, a state in which we find ourselves now, since we were exiled from the land of our fathers . . . The merciful Father, in His great compassion, will gather the exiled of His people. He will send His anointed one to restore them to their former state. He will bring them to the Holy Land. There they will build a House of God, and renew their sacrifices and prayers . . . (1807 edition, p. 80).

These words are followed by a description of the Ten Commandments and all that evolves from them.

More important, and crucial, is the second part, which describes the full range of a Jew's duties to the modern state. Above all, Homberg emphasizes the universal meaning of *re'a* (neighbor, fellow-man). All the duties of a Jew in relation to another Jew, he asserts, are also binding in his relations to non-Jews: "Every human being is called *re'a* to an Israelite, although he may not be his brother in faith" (p. 246).

He next discusses at length the economic activities of the Jew, especially praising the various trades and agriculture. He is not contemptuous of commerce, as were many *maskilim*, and actually speaks of it as "a fine and useful occupation, for the good of society as a whole" (p. 292).⁵ Nevertheless, he indicates that "it would not be proper for society to have too many peddlers and vendors." In the spirit of the physiocrats he explains:

Unlike the farmers and vintners, who produce grain, wine or oil, the merchants do not cultivate or prepare anything . . . Their number should therefore be only in proportion to the number of farmers, shepherds, fishermen, hunters and craftsmen who, after all, are the mainstay of so-

5. This view was also strongly defended by Mendelssohn in his "Foreword" to the German translation of Manasseh ben Israel's *Teshu'at Israel*. See *Ketabim Qetanim*, pp. 157–160.

ciety, whereas all the other groups lean upon them and maintain themselves through them (p. 294).

Following this, Homberg dwells at length on the other duties of the individual Jew toward the state, insisting again and again on his patriotic duty “to endanger his very life in the day of battle and to make a supreme effort to save the fatherland from the enemy. . .” “Happy is the one,” he declares, “who after the battle is over” can take off his armor and proudly say, “also I had a share among the saviors of my people. Here are my wounds. I shed my blood for the land of my fathers and in order [to wipe] off the tears of the oppressed” (p. 486).

Homberg teaches not only patriotic duties in time of war and on the battlefield. He is as serious with the Jew’s civic duties in time of peace. The responsibility to pay all tolls and taxes he regards as almost a holy obligation, as if it were ordered from Heaven. Moreover, it must be done, he says, “good-heartedly and with love” (pp. 486–488).

He assumes similar attitudes in his two other, shorter catechisms, *Bnei Zion, Figli de Sion* (Augsburg, 1812) and *Ben Yaqir* (Vienna, 1820; Warsaw, 1824). Repeatedly he insists that *re’a*, as used in the Pentateuch, is of universal meaning and not merely a brother in faith. Nor is there much difference between one catechism and the others regarding Homberg’s economic views. The Jew, he emphasizes, must select an occupation that is productive, like, for instance, some craft or agriculture, and keep away, as much as possible, from commerce.

As just mentioned, he stresses above all the supreme loyalty that a Jew owes to the state and its ruler, for whose safety he must be ready to sacrifice his very life. On the other hand, he also includes the belief in a future Messiah among a Jew’s major articles of Faith:

We do believe that God will send us an anointed leader, to teach the people of Israel and to enlighten them in the Word of God, to give the people strength and steadiness easily to resist all evil temptations and to encourage them to brotherly unity and humanitarianism. This Messiah will erect a temple in which all the nations of the world will offer their prayers (*Ben Yaqir*, p. 20).

Obviously, the ideal is lofty in its universalism, but the tangible element of this belief, the hope of returning to Zion, has been completely left out.

More Jewishly motivated and more traditional in spirit was another catechism, *Yesodei Ha-Dath (The Foundations of the Faith)* (1811), by Yehudah Leib Benzeb (1764–1811), one of the greatest Hebraists of modern times. His *Talmud Lashon Ibri* (1796, twelve editions) and *Ozar Ha-Shorashim* (1807–1808) became basic texts for the study of Hebrew throughout the 19th century. However, we mention him here particularly on account of his catechism. Like Homberg’s *Imrei Shefer*, which must have inspired Benzeb, *Yesodei Ha-Dath* also consists of two parts, one—containing the duties to God, and the other—the duties to man.

Interesting is Benzeb's "First Foreword," in which he describes the great change in the Jewish condition that had occurred in the last fifty years.

Since we were exiled from our land, until some fifty years ago we were considered as strangers among the nations, and like aliens from another land. We had no rights nor any part of the land. . . . We were deprived of all the privileges of the citizen and the permanent inhabitants. . . . Our ways and customs have also become perverted. We paid no attention to the language and literature of the people among whom we were living. . . . If our neighbors displayed contempt for us and derided us for our stammering speech, they really wronged us, because they paid no attention to what caused it, and that it was only the unique situation in which we were placed that brought it about. Again, when we were abused that we were a lazy people, contemptuous of cultivating the land or pursuing a trade or craft, but solely dealing with commerce, a business of cheating and robbing, this was again a false accusation, because—who caused us to deal only with commerce? They alone, who excluded us from agriculture and who kept us away from the arts and crafts. . . . This is also true regarding military service. They accused us of cowardice for not going to war; however, it was they who kept us out of the army whenever they went to war.

All this, however, has changed in the last fifty years, when God awakened a new spirit in the hearts of kings and princes, to break the yoke that had been pressing upon us, and to remove the wall that has been separating us from them . . . to admit us amongst them, and grant us all civil rights. From now on, we shall no longer be like exiles and strangers in a foreign land, provided we take upon ourselves all the duties of the citizen, to keep all the laws of the state, and to carry out all the king's commands, as long as there is no conflict between them and our religion.

In view of this great change, Benzeb then asserts that Jews can no longer act as they did in the past:

How can we witness kings and princes welcoming us with large and valuable gifts: liberating us, gathering us into their midst, granting us the right of the citizen—and just sit idly by, and not rush toward them, stretching forth our arms to them to receive us. Would not this be a sin?

Following this long *haqdamah* (preface), Benzeb formulates the "foundations" of the faith of Judaism according to Maimonides. Noteworthy, again, is the twelfth article, the Messianic hope:

Lo, the days are coming and God will send us the Messiah of the House of David to redeem the exiles and restore them to the land of their possession (p. 72).

More important, at least in the present framework, is the second part of the work, in which the author describes a Jew's duties in modern society. Following Homberg, he first advises the individual Jew to choose an occupation that requires "toil and diligence, and which is of benefit to society at large, such as agriculture or a manual trade." A man who does so, he writes, enhances the welfare of the state, and is "beloved by God and man" (p. 158). Contrarily, he sharply condemns the one who maintains himself by usury.

In the spirit of the age he interprets *re'akha* (thy neighbor) as "your fellow-man"; any duty of an Israelite toward his neighbor, he writes, also obligates him in relation to those of another faith.

Everyone must remain faithful to the faith in which he was born and in which he was brought up, but in the state the various members of different religions are all equal, and there is no difference amongst them (p. 170).

What does the duty of being faithful to one's native land imply, he asks, and then promptly answers:

The land in which one was born, settled on its soil and acquired wealth, that land is his "chosen land." He must seek its peace and pray for its welfare. Everyone must try, as much as he can, to enhance the success of his land and the happiness of its inhabitants. A country may be likened to a person, and every individual to a piece of one body. As all parts of the body rally to action when one part is attacked, so every man of valor must arm himself and join other warriors . . . when his native land is endangered by enemies . . . (pp. 176–178).

A few more questions and answers by Benzeb make his views even more precise. "Does also an Israelite have a fatherland?" he asks. "Yes," he answers.

The land in which the Israelite lives and exercises his religion in freedom, without coercion or molestation, and which, moreover, allows him to settle wherever he pleases and to pursue whatever occupation he chooses, that land is his fatherland, and the king of that land is his king, its laws are his laws and the duties of its citizens are his duties.

And further:

Is it proper for an Israelite to become a citizen, although he expects to return to the land of his forefathers by the aid of the Messiah who is destined to come? "Yes," [he answers], "as long as that Messiah did not come, the Israelite is a citizen of the land in which he was born and in which he is living."

As for the more general question of a possible conflict between civil law and religious Jewish law, Benzeb dismisses it with the general statement:

The religious laws of an Israelite will not stop him from fulfilling his civil duties. In time of peace there is nothing to interfere with one's religion, but in time of war . . . some laws will be suspended (pp. 180–182).

There is little doubt, when comparing this catechism with Homberg's, that Benzeb is more moderate and less subservient in spirit. He devotes more concern to ceremonial Jewish law and defines the Messianic belief in national rather than universalist-spiritualist terms. Homberg's insistence on the moral aspect of paying taxes simply reeks of servility and the absence of any sense of honesty and propriety, especially as regards the interest of his own people. In contradiction to Homberg, who demands an unconditional Jewish patriotism of the

highest order, never even mentioning the many discriminatory policies that were then still in existence against the Jews and hampering all their moves and activities, Benzeb, while no less patriotic, shows a much greater awareness of the degraded Jewish position. His definition of a "fatherland" is purely functional, i.e., it is a place where one enjoys religious and economic freedom. Give the Jews such freedoms, he seems to be saying, and they will be good citizens and patriots. Even Jewish patriotism, he clearly implies, has its price.

More than a decade after the appearance of Homberg's first edition of *Imrei Shefer* (1802) and one year prior to the appearance of his *Bnei Zion* (1815), another catechism, a much shorter and a more moderate one, came out, *Shorshei Emunah (The Roots of Faith)* (London, 1815), by Sholem HaCohen (1772–1845). All in all it runs to some fifty-six pages, with Hebrew on the right side and an English translation on the left, and is patterned after the catechisms of Homberg and Benzeb. HaCohen first centers the discussion on Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith and, subsequently, on the Ten Commandments. Worth noting is HaCohen's conservative formulation of the Messianic article:

We believe that the Messiah will come at the end of a time that is known to God alone. He will then gather the exiled of Israel, and restore the monarchy of the House of David (p. 10).

Following the question-and-answer format of the earlier catechisms, HaCohen poses several fundamental questions. Thus: "Can one attain true success by faith alone?", to which he answers "no." "One must work hard, to keep all the laws and commandments which are based on that faith, and only then will one attain the highest perfection" (p. 11). Subsequently he asks: "Is reason alone sufficient to inform us about our duties?" The answer he gives is again "No: human reason is limited; we need a Torah revealed from Heaven, so that we may know what to do and what not to do" (p. 18). Moreover: "The Torah we now possess, both the written and the oral, is divine and absolutely true; we cannot transgress, change or reform it" (pp. 19–20). Finally, two more questions and answers. In connection with the fifth *dibbrah* (Commandment): "Honor thy father and thy mother," the author asks: "What other duty does this *dibbra* imply?", to which he answers: "to love the king, the lord of the land, and to have great fear of him." Another question: "What other duties toward the king is one to fulfill?" The reply is: "To pray for his peace and welfare, and to carry out all his commands, to the extent that they do not contradict the divine laws."

One final question:

We Israelites, who are awaiting the coming of the Messiah and the return to the Land of Israel, are we also under obligation to love the king and the state in which we live and to carry out all the commands of the state like all the other people of the land?

The answer:

As long as our Redeemer, the Messiah, did not come, we must consider the king as a king of Israel, and the state in which we live and maintain ourselves securely and peacefully . . . as the land of our forefathers.

A comparison of Homberg's *Bnei Zion* and *Ben Yaqir*, on the one hand, and HaCohen's *Shorshei Emunah*, on the other hand, clearly indicates the difference between them. Homberg, it appears, belittles, reduces or altogether dismisses the unique Jewish national aspect of the Messianic faith, the hope of returning to Zion, emphasizing, instead, the spiritual-universal aspect. Contrariwise, HaCohen represents a more traditional-national orientation. He also desires emancipation, but not at the high-cost of altogether renouncing Jewish customs and traditions and rejecting the ancient belief in a future redeemer. More significant, perhaps, is HaCohen's affirmation of the belief in the revealed nature of the Torah, without which, he asserts, the ceremonial law would be without a basis or validity. Such assertions seem to have been directed against the deistic tendencies which had set in among some of the German *maskilim* after the death of Mendelssohn.⁶

One need only detach oneself from the generation of the catechism writers and retreat no farther back than one or two generations, to realize fully the deep change that the Jewish mentality had undergone in so brief a span of time. At the very time when Moses Meldessohn was trying to convince his German contemporaries that the difference between them and the Jews is only in religion,⁷ the great rabbis and spiritual Jewish leaders of his day expressed their deep concern about the spreading of this view among the Jews of the time. Jonathan Eibeschutz and Jacob Emden, Moshe Hagiz and the Gaon of Wilno, as well as the early leaders of Hasidism and others, were all appalled by the weakening hold of the memory of Zion on the Jewish consciousness, and its replacement by a gradual reconciliation on their part with life in the lands of the dispersion.⁸

Indications of this fateful change had become noticeable much earlier. The ever harsher exactions and extortions imposed on Italian Jewry, from the age of the anti-Reformation and onward notwithstanding, these were among the first Jewish communities in Europe to display their deep attachment to their native land. The 16th-century banker, Ishmael Rieti, for instance, declared his love for Siena and rejected the

6. Cf. "The Treatment of the Jewish Religion in the Literature of the Berlin Haskalah," by this writer, in PAAJR, XXIV (1955): 39–68.

7. "Notes" on Michaelis in Moses Mendelssohn, *Yerushalayim, Ketavim Qetanim b'Inyenei Yehudim veYahaduth* (Tel Aviv, 1947), p. 175.

8. See, Ben Zion Dinur, *Sefer Ha-Tsionuth*, edited, annotated and introduced, Vol. I, book 1, chap. 1, *Mabo*; chap. 2, *Mabo and passim*.

suggestion to exchange it for Jerusalem.⁹ Equally well known is Yehuda Aryeh Modena's great love for Venice, and the nostalgia that he felt whenever he was separated from that city.¹⁰ R. Simone Luzzatto was also a Venetian patriot who declared that it is the "ardent desire" of its Jews to shed their blood in the defense of the Republic.¹¹ Even stronger emotions on this subject were expressed, though in a more negative way, about half a century later by the Jewish "Intellectuals" of Amsterdam, who resented the activity of the emissaries from the Holy Land and who sarcastically advised them to cease that activity and get out of the Holy Land.¹² A growing indifference to the Holy Land was also reported by Hida (Hayyim Yoseph David Azulai), the eminent emissary from Eretz Israel in the 18th century.¹³

These were fateful developments, which assumed greater significance with the arrival of the age of Haskalah in the last quarter of the 18th century. It was only then, in consequence of the awakened hope for Jewish emancipation, that a new ideology about the future of Judaism began to arise. Essentially, that ideology renounced Jewish nationhood and expressed a readiness to settle in the lands of the Gentiles on a permanent basis. Even devoted Hebraists like N. H. Wessely, J. Satanow, and Benzeb enthusiastically embraced the hope of emancipation and called upon their co-religionists to accommodate to it in the framework of traditional Judaism. Formally, at least, they still retained a belief in a future Messiah, but without much strength or true commitment. Indeed, their attitude constituted a breach with the past. Never before had a sizeable group of Jewish writers and intellectuals openly abandoned their *galuth* mentality and declared their fervent hope of becoming citizens in the lands of the nations.

The catechisms were but one form of reaction, and a rather direct one, to the hope of emancipation. That hope also evoked other reactions. Strange as it may seem, the much more pronounced characteristic of the Hebrew Haskalah literature, its return to the Bible in both idiom and themes, may perhaps also be interpreted—to some degree at least—as such a reaction. Beginning with N. H. Wessely, at the end of the 18th century, and concluding with J. L. Gordon's poetry of the ro-

9. See "Sippur David HaRe'ubeni" in *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, ed. Ad. Neubauer (Oxford, 1895; Jerusalem, 1967), II, p. 163; see also *Igroth Beth Rieti*, ed. Ya'acov Boksenboim (Tel Aviv, 1987), pp. 202–203.

10. *Igroth . . . Modena*, ed. Y. Boksenboim (Tel Aviv, 1984), pp. 132, 42; *Hayyei Yehudah*, ed. Daniel Carpi (Tel Aviv, 1945), pp. 57, 60 and more.

11. "Ma'amar 'al Yehudei Venezia," translated into Hebrew by Ricardo Benjamin Bachi and A. Schulvass *Tyyun*, VIII (Jerusalem, 1951): 100.

12. Moshe Hagiz, *Sefer Sfath Emeth* (1697, Wilno: 1876), pp. 14, 28, 30, 68, 76, 88 and more.

13. See *Ma'agal Tov Hashalem*, introduced and annotated by Ahron Freiman (Jerusalem), *passim*.

matic period of the sixties of the 19th century, Hebrew poets and narrators turned ever more to the Biblical past for inspiration and literary subject-matter. However, it was not prophetic Judaism, with its lofty idealism, that inspired them, but, rather, what appeared to them as the more dramatic and earth-bound elements of the Biblical narrative. Against a pastoral background of hard working farmers, shepherds and winegrowers, these writers and poets extolled the courage and heroism of the ancient Israelites, their love of freedom and, above all, their passion for life and enjoyment. They conceived of them not only as fierce fighters but, also, as lovers of wine and women.¹⁴

This literature was also distinguished by another, and contradictory, characteristic: it was, to a great extent, aristocratic. If Wessely's *Shirei Tifereth* was dominated by the towering figure of Moses, Efrati's *Melukhat Sha'ul* was dominated by the tragic figure of King Saul, and Scholem HaCohen's *Nir David* by that of King David. King David was again the subject of two lengthy epics by Gordon, while King Solomon was the hero of Michal's *Shlomo v' Qohelet*. This tendency reached its height in the historical novels of Abraham Mapu, especially in the pastoral *Ahavat Zion*, where the Judean and Samaritan aristocracies of the 8th and 7th centuries BCE were resuscitated and idealized. In short, not only did the *maskilim* of the 18th-19th centuries return to the Bible, but their conception of the Biblical past, its social classes and manners of life, were all in the spirit of 18th-century European Christian society. Obviously, such conceptions built bridges between Jews and Christians and contributed toward rapprochement. Thus, it may not be far-fetched to consider the Biblical elements in the Hebrew Haskalah literature as also inspired by the hope of emancipation. They aimed to depict the ancient Israelites as "natural" and free of all the characteristics that had become unique features of the Jews in the eyes of the Gentile world. Implied in that literature was a plea by its writers and poets on behalf of the Jews to be restored to the ancient freedoms in order to become fully rehabilitated and integrated into the modern states.

14. Noteworthy are Efrati's *Melukhat Sha'ul* (Wien, 1793); Gabriel Berger's "*Moshe v'Sipporah*," *Ha-Me'assef* (1810, Tamuz, Elul and Kislev issues); I. B. Bing's *Obed v'Tirzah* (Rödelheim, 1810), and more. See especially H. N. Schapiro, *Toledoth Ha-Sifruth ha-Ibrit Ha-Hadashah* (Tel Aviv: Vilkowishki), *passim*.

Yiddishism and Judaism

EMANUEL S. GOLDSMITH

EVER SINCE THE EMANCIPATION AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT, there seems to have been no end to the making of definitions of Judaism. Although Aristotle spoke of a definition as "a sentence signifying what a thing is," Samuel Butler was probably more to the point when he described a definition as "the enclosing of a wilderness of ideas within a world of words."¹ Nevertheless, in a paper with a title such as this, there is no choice but to begin with a definition of terms.

Judaism has been defined by Mordecai M. Kaplan as "the ongoing life of a people intent upon keeping alive for the highest conceivable purpose, despite changes in the general climate of opinion."² This definition takes into account both the existential dimension (the ongoing life of a people) and the essential dimension (the highest conceivable purpose) of the Jewish phenomenon. It takes into account both peoplehood, or nationalism, and civilization, or culture. Religion is subsumed under the rubric "highest conceivable purpose," since religion is that aspect of human culture or civilization which consciously seeks cognizance of, and contact with, the transcendent or highest aspects of human experience. In Judaism, the latter are conceived of as Divinity, Deity or God. Finally, the words "intent upon keeping alive" remind us that whatever other objectives it may assume, the survival of the Jewish people (*kiyem ha-ume*) remains a *sine qua non* of Judaism.

Yiddishism, which has alternatively been called the Yiddish language movement, the Yiddish culture movement, or the Yiddish language and culture movement, is a modern expression of Judaism which came into being at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries as a result of the revolutionary upheavals in the life of the Jewish people and the consequent redefinitions of its selfhood which had begun in the middle of the eighteenth century with the emergence of Hasidism or Jewish pietism, on the one hand, and Has-

1. Quoted in Michael McKenna, *The Stein and Day Dictionary of Definitive Quotations* (New York, 1983), p. 50.

2. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence* (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 40.

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kalah, or Jewish enlightenment, on the other.³ Hasidism, without intending to, unleashed both a populism, or awareness of the folk aspects of the Jewish religion, as well as a questioning of the halakhic or legalistic emphases of traditional Judaism that would emerge only a century later.

Even more than Hasidism, the Haskalah (a word which, translated literally, means “rationalism”) called into question the exclusive hegemony of Torah or traditional religious culture as the overriding preoccupation of the Jewish mind. It also caused a rift in the symbiosis of peoplehood and religion that had been the hallmark of Jewish civilization for millennia. Now that Torah was no longer the be-all and end-all of Jewish intellectual concern and romantic idealization, new forms of Jewish existence and interpretations of Jewish religion and culture evolved. The officially monolithic structure of Judaism was shattered forever and numerous Judaisms competed for the allegiance and support of the modernized Jew. The picture was further complicated by the fact that this modern Jew now no longer belonged exclusively to the Jewish community, but was on the way to becoming (or already was) a citizen of the country in which he lived and a participant in its culture which, ironically, when it was not overtly hostile, still harbored resentments against him and his Judaism.

In Western Europe, where Jewish communities were small and widely scattered, the road to emancipation, enfranchisement and the integration of the Jew into the general body politic resulted in a general sloughing off of the folk and national aspects of Judaism and in attempts at creating new forms of Jewish identity based upon diverse interpretations of the religious heritage. The growth of Reform, Orthodoxy and the Historical School of Judaism went hand in hand with cultural assimilation, including linguistic self-denial. It was sustained by the rise of the Science of Judaism, or modern Jewish historical and literary scholarship, which set out to prove to Jew and non-Jew alike that only the Jewish religious heritage separated them. Judaism, once freed of its nationalist entanglements, was, in fact, more like Christianity than different from it. Discrimination and persecution of the Jew was unenlightened and intellectually abhorrent.

In Eastern Europe, where Jews lived in compact, mass settlements usually removed from the general population, and where chances of integration and citizenship were, therefore, virtually non-existent, it was precisely the populist and peoplehood aspects of Judaism that came to be emphasized once Hasidism and Haskalah had taught their lessons to the small numbers of Jewish merchants, professionals, and disenchanted Yeshivah students who were willing to read forbidden litera-

3. Cf. Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement* (New York, 1987).

ture, buck the generally insecure Jewish communities, and proclaim themselves *maskilim* or, later, socialist or Zionist revolutionaries. With the growth of modern nationalism throughout Europe and, especially, in the Czarist and Austro-Hungarian empires, the Eastern European Jewish intellectuals drew support for their growing awareness of Jews as a modern nation from the various exponents of modern European nationalism. Two elements of that nationalism were of particular significance to those Eastern European Jewish intellectuals who fathered Yiddishism: 1) language as the essence of national identity, and 2) anti-clericalism or secularism.

In Biblical Hebrew, the term "tongue" or "language" is a synonym for "nation."⁴ In the Book of Psalms, the liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery is described as its escape from a people of "strange speech."⁵ In the Dictionary of the History of Ideas, we read that

it is surely no mere accident that *nation* and *language community* tend on the whole to become coextensive terms. A common language and a common literary heritage have at all times been among the most powerful factors for creating a feeling for national unity.⁶

[Language, writes Mordecai M. Kaplan],

brings into play the remembrance of past heroes and events of history, the customs to which every member of the people is expected to conform, laws which regulate conflicts of interests and help maintain the peace, and folkways which include characteristic forms of esthetic self-expression.⁷

However mystical the concept, something of a nation's soul is always revealed in its language. Although national consciousness usually arises with concern for language, the relationship between language and nation is more than merely formal. "The difference between one language and another is not only a phonetic difference," writes Aryeh Tarkover, "it is also a difference of internal structure."⁸

This emphasis on the centrality of language in Jewish identity first came into prominence at the First Yiddish Language Conference in Czernowitz, Bukovina, in 1908, where it was eloquently expressed by Matisyohu Mises:

Whoever holds the future of his people dear and does not want Judaism to disappear must join those who seek the emancipation of Yiddish. . . . Affording Yiddish the right to develop is a sacred national cause and a contribution to the progress of humanity. . . . Yiddish is our language with a distinct stamp of our spirit. . . . The national essence is not in the bare words; it expresses itself in the internal construction, in the contents breathed into the acquired elements, in the phonetic form and, princi-

4. See Solomon Mandelkern, *Konkordantsya Latanakh* (Tel Aviv, 1971), p. 651.

5. *Psalms* 114:1.

6. Philip P. Wiener, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York, 1973), vol. 3, p. 660b.

7. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew* (New York, 1948), p. 85.

8. Aryeh Tarkover, "Hurban Hasafah Utehiyat Hasafah," *Binetivey Hagut Vatarbut*, ed. Y. Shapiro (Tel Aviv, 1970), pp. 230-31.

pally, in the entire sea of feelings, images, associations, jokes, etc., which have grown into the mute, blind, material. . . .⁹

Under the impact of the growing struggle for the recognition of Yiddish as the language of Jewry throughout the world and in the Austro-Hungarian empire, in particular, and in response to the mushrooming of the Hebrew-culture movement, the Yiddishists mustered their forces at this First Yiddish Language Conference, which marked the conscious recognition and public proclamation of the Yiddish language as a factor of national significance in the life of the Jewish people. In declaring Yiddish to be a national language of Jewry, the Conference symbolized the culmination of a thousand years of Jewish linguistic and cultural creativity as well as the consummation of several centuries of efforts to raise the status of the language. It discredited and, to some extent, erased the pejorative designation, "Jargon," which, although accepted even by many outstanding Yiddish writers at the time, had hounded the language for more than a hundred years. It helped to reinstate, officially, the older and more dignified name, "Yiddish."

As an expression of modern nationalistic tendencies within Jewry at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Conference brought together adherents of a variety of trends, philosophies, doctrines, parties, and alignments in Jewish life. It highlighted important developments within each of these, underscoring areas of agreement and possible cooperation among them and pointing up disagreements and antagonisms. It signaled the emergence of modern Yiddish literature and of the Yiddish press and theater as potent factors in modern Jewish life. It heralded new developments in Jewish scholarship and education, such as the modern Yiddish translation of the Bible by Yehoash (Solomon Bloomgarten; 1872–1927), the founding of the Yiddish Scientific Institute (Yivo) in Vilna in 1925, and the development of the Yiddish secularist school system in Eastern Europe and America in the second decade of the twentieth century. It gave added impetus to the emerging doctrines of Yiddishism and stimulated the Hebrew-Yiddish language controversy that raged in Jewish life and letters up until the Second World War.

The linguistic principle of modern nationalism, which became one of the primary bases of Yiddishism, imbued the creators and devotees of Yiddish literature, press and theater with a sense of the significance of their work and a love for, as well as a dedication to, the Jewish people that extended far beyond the borders of the Yiddish-speaking world, and benefited Jewish life everywhere. But, whereas the fruits which emerged from the implementation of this principle were warmly accepted, the principle, itself, was overwhelmingly rejected. While the pri-

9. Quoted in Goldsmith, *Op. cit.*, pp. 208, 203.

macy of language became the foundation of modern nationalism for many peoples, it could never serve as such for the Jewish people.

Jewish group consciousness had emerged millennia before modern nationalism emphasized either territoriality or linguistic uniformity as prerequisites of nationhood. Jewish group consciousness and loyalty were traditionally functions of the religious Torah culture and its halakhic regimen. Scripture and liturgy continuously reinforced the idea that all Jews were heirs of the Patriarchs and that they were all brothers responsible for one another. The laws and ideas of Judaism, rather than land or language, were considered primary in the scale of Jewish values and central to daily existence. This was also the major reason, until the holocaust, for some Jewish opposition to Zionism.

Having survived the disappearance of Hebrew and Aramaic as vernacular languages, Jews, in their hierarchy of values, could never accord centrality to any of their Diaspora tongues, however attached they may have become to them. In addition, unlike other oppressed peoples for whom national languages were emblems of liberation and self-assertion, Jewish national aspirations could never be divorced from the languages of the Bible and the Talmud. If land and language were central to the awakening peoples of Europe during the "springtime of nations," for most Jews religion superseded both territoriality and tongue as primary.¹⁰

Secularism, or anti-clericalism, was, similarly, a foreign norm and an alien ideal that Yiddishism sought to graft onto Judaism. According to Chaim Zhitlovsky,

just as Jewish religion is absolutely independent of any national existence, so Jewish national existence is absolutely independent of any religious faith. . . . We Jews are a secular nation—for which religion is a personal matter as it is for every other people—struggling for its existence and for its free progressive development as do all other progressive peoples.¹¹

For most European peoples, however, self-definition and independence were linked to liberation from the medieval church, which was usually seen as cosmopolitan and anti-national. In Eastern Europe, where Yiddishism took shape, the most powerful churches—Russian Orthodox and Polish Catholic—were linked to oppressive, reactionary regimes that had to be fought in the struggle for national identity and liberation. For Jews, on the other hand, religion was an indigenous phenomenon guarding the hope of national liberation and freedom from the yoke of foreign oppressors. While rabbis and scholars might sometimes be accused of insensitivity to the sufferings of the common people, they could not be considered inimical to Jewish national hopes and feelings. In the main, they themselves came from the lower classes and

10. Cf. Leybush Lehrer, *Yidishkeyt un Andere Problemen* (New York, 1940), pp. 51–96.

11. Chaim Zhitlovsky, *Mayne Ani Mamins* (New York, 1953), pp. 270–71.

suffered, along with their people, the indignities of oppression and impoverishment.

The secularism of the Yiddishists was, for the most part, a dogmatic illusion which detached them from the deepest emotions of Jewry and robbed them of the sustaining power of the religious regimen and religious symbolism. They remained aloof from the modern synagogue and from the various attempts of Jewry to adjust Jewish religion to the conditions of the twentieth century. All of this might have been defensible had the Yiddishists developed institutions to sustain their version of Judaism and to perpetuate it in the Diaspora, but the truth of the matter is that Yiddishism was, for many, merely a stepping stone to assimilation. Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* in New York, was, for many years, vigorously opposed to the establishment of Yiddish secular schools.¹² Americanization was his sole goal for his immigrant readers. The urge to assimilate was not limited, of course, to the Yiddishists. Zionism, Hebraism, and the modern Jewish religious movements could be similarly accused, to some extent, of harboring hidden assimilationist desires. But, to perpetuate their forms of Judaism, these other movements created institutional organs in which their theories could be constantly questioned and revised, while Yiddishism remained largely theoretical and lacking in institutions. The theory of Yiddishism failed to inspire the kind of devotion from its followers that would lead to deliberate planning for the future. The negative attitude to the synagogue prevented the establishment of Yiddishist synagogues that might have incorporated Yiddish culture in the worship and education of a modern house of assembly.¹³ Yiddishists spent much of their energy in justly attacking the destructive attitude to Yiddish on the part of militant Hebraism in Palestine, or in blindly applauding the few crumbs thrown to Yiddish in the Soviet Union. But, when Hebrew culture was mercilessly silenced in the Soviet Union, the Yiddishists, except for a few notable exceptions, failed to raise their voices adequately in protest.

With the decline of the *shtetl* and the destruction of Eastern European Jewry, the heartland of Yiddish culture in which Jewish secularism had emerged vanished forever, and both the Yiddishist and Hebraist versions of Jewish secularism were dealt severe blows. Despite its successes in Israel, Hebraist secularism has never succeeded in taking root in the Diaspora, while Yiddish secularism, on the other hand, has had to pay the price for what Abraham Golomb has called "an organic internal defect." Yiddishism, he writes,

had no self-awareness, did not plumb its own depths. We were socialists with Yiddish, anarchists with Yiddish, Zionists with Yiddish. Yiddish was

12. Cf. David Shub, *Fun di Amolike Yorn* (New York, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 772–76.

13. Cf. Solomon Simon, *Emune fun a Dor* (New York, 1970), pp. 112–132.

something extra, not an end in itself. We were Yiddishists only to the extent that [and for as long as] Jews spoke Yiddish.

Yiddishism failed to see itself as a movement of, by, and for, the Jewish people. It denied its "folkist" or national character even to itself.

Even in the one practical area—in our school system—we did not want to recognize Yiddishism as the ideal of a universal people with a language and culture of its own and its own fully organized peoplehood.¹⁴

This lack of a unifying principle may explain why Yiddishism allowed itself to become encumbered with anti-religionism.

Jewish secularism, in both its Hebraist and Yiddishist versions, has been in conflict with itself for many years. It denied the significance of traditional Jewish religious practices and symbols. Hebraists negated everything that smacked of exile (*shelilat ha-golah*) and attempted to create a new Biblical people, while Yiddishists avoided everything that smacked of religion. The result is that the Jewish people, both in Israel and the Diaspora, is paying a heavy price for the failure of the secularists to articulate acceptable versions of secular Judaism for those Jews who became estranged from organized Jewish religious life.

Having exposed the theoretical inadequacies of Yiddishism or Yiddish secularism, we must not be oblivious to its achievements. The traditional Jewish concept that "practice, not theory, is what really counts" manifestly applies here. To a very large extent, Yiddishism was, in no small measure, responsible for the Jewish survival of large numbers of Eastern European Jews, both in their native lands and in lands of immigration. Those who had abandoned what had become for them a rigid, fundamentalist and intolerant way of life were, in very many cases, kept from abandoning Judaism and the Jewish people by the alternative offered to them by Yiddishism. Yiddish language and culture were barriers to disaffection and defection. In its still, small voice Yiddishism proclaimed: "*Ad kan!* this far you may go but no further!" The hidden agenda of the Czernowitz conference and of all subsequent Yiddish conclaves was *kiyem ha-ume*—the survival of the Jewish people and the maintenance and furtherance of Jewish distinctiveness and identity.¹⁵

The phenomenal rise of Yiddish literature and the growth of the Yiddish press, theater, and educational trends increased the significance of the language in the twentieth century. Yiddish literature attracted many of the leading literary talents of the Hebrew and Russian press. The works of Mendele, Sholom Aleichem, Peretz, Asch, Pinski, Reisen, Leivick, and other writers became classics of the Jewish heritage, thus making the language in which they were written more significant than ever. Yiddish literature mirrored the diversity and variety of Jewish life and the international character of the Jewish people. By

14. Abraham Golomb, *Tsu di Heykhn fun Yidishn Gayst* (Paris, 1971), p. 188.

15. Cf. Yudel Mark, "Trakhtenishn vegn Kiyum Ha-ume," *Tsuskunft* (May–June 1973).

and large, it managed to avoid the pessimism, nihilism, and brutality of much of modern Western literature. It faithfully reflected the traditional values and ethical emphases of Jewish civilization; it strengthened the Jewish will to live and the Jew's commitment to a better future for his people and for mankind as a whole.

The bitter controversy between Yiddishists and Hebraists, despite some of its narrower manifestations, was a sign of the vitality of the Jewish people as it entered the world of the twentieth century. The struggle, symbolizing as it did conflicting interpretations of Jewish history and destiny, unlocked many powers that had been dormant in Jewry for centuries. Interestingly, the major Hebrew and Yiddish writers were bilingual. Their work in one language deepened and enriched their work in the other.

Yiddishism scored its greatest triumphs and became a leading force in Jewish life during the first several decades of the twentieth century. It drew its basic strength from the fact that, at the turn of the century, Yiddish was spoken by three out of every four Jews in the world.¹⁶ The Yiddish press was the chief medium of enlightenment and entertainment for millions of Jews, and their primary source of information and interpretation of Jewish and general life. Yiddish theater and literature were unrivaled as the basic cultural fare of the vast majority of Jews. Yiddish was the language of instruction in the overwhelming majority of tradition-oriented Jewish schools and in the newly emerging Jewish secularist school systems that resulted from the alliance of Yiddishism and the various Jewish political parties. Yiddish culture was also winning the recognition of West European Jews and even of non-Jews who appreciated its authenticity and artistic excellence.

Yiddishism was, essentially, an ideological movement with a mystique, theory, and program of its own. The ideology of Yiddishism fired the Jewish people's imagination with a new interpretation of Jewish history and destiny. It stimulated the Jew's will to live and his determination to survive as a Jew. It aroused creative potentialities and artistic impulses, engendering a cultural renaissance of magnitude and significance. Yiddishism, together with its counterpart, Hebraism, spelled the cultural rebirth of the Jewish people in modern times.

The mystique of Yiddishism derived not only from the unprecedented flowering of Yiddish language and culture. It stemmed, principally, from the fact that Yiddishism represented the serious attempt of a major portion of Jewry to confront itself, as well as the world of the twentieth century, as a modern, "normal" nation. In this respect, Yiddishism was the product of forces similar to those which gave rise to the Zionist movement in Western Europe. It set out to relieve the unbearable psychological pressure and tension that the Jew experi-

16. A. Tartakover, *Hahevrah Hayehudit* (Tel Aviv, 5717), p. 210f.

enced as he emerged from a segregated world of outcasts into the spiritual and mental climate of twentieth-century Europe.

The program of Yiddishism involved agitation for the acknowledgment by Jews of Yiddish as the national living language of Jewry and the central factor of Jewish life, and its legal recognition by the international community as the official language of the Jewish people. During the period under discussion, Yiddish became an official language of such significant Jewish international welfare agencies as ORT, OZE, HIAS, the Zionist and Jewish Socialist movements, and all Jewish political parties in Eastern Europe. The distinguished Yiddish poet, Abraham Walt Lyessin, referred to Hebrew as the national language of Jewry, and Yiddish as its international language.

The world of Yiddish culture provided a satisfying form of Jewish association and involvement for millions of Jews during the first half of the twentieth century and only the ever-accelerating pace of linguistic assimilation and the European holocaust were able radically to diminish its power and influence. The integration of Jewry into the body politic of other nations spelled the end of the process of Jewish language creativity that had begun in antiquity. The new world in which Jewry found itself after the First World War made the maintenance of cultural differentiation in lands of immigration more and more difficult. The German war against the Jewish people resulted in the destruction of the heartland of Ashkenazic Jewry and of the Jewish communities in which Yiddish language and culture had reached their apogee. The holocaust brought an end to that sector of the Jewish world, without which Yiddish remained bereft of the principal source of its vitality and influence. In the Soviet Union, what Hitler failed to accomplish was achieved by Stalin and his henchmen, who viewed Yiddish and Yiddish culture as embodiments of Jewish separatism and internationalism.

The Yiddishists have also remained the only organized Jewish trend to acknowledge publicly the incontestable value of the Yiddish language and literature as depositories and wellsprings of Jewish peoplehood and Jewish values in modern times. With all our respect for Hebrew and its ability to link us with ancient glories and with all our admiration for the miracle of the revival of spoken Hebrew, we must assert again and again that the creativity of the Jewish people did not cease in the Biblical or Rabbinic periods. We must also remember that the attempt to revive Hebrew included more than a dose of self-deprecation and the desire to sever ties with what were considered to be the despicable Jews of the *galut* and their culture. Yiddish, on the other hand, is, indeed, what Hyman Bass called

the fullest, most complete and most faithful path to our people because it represents the most complete development of the creative forces in Jewish life; because it brings us the sincere love of Jewish generations that

yearned and struggled; because Yiddish connects us with Jews of other communities; because Yiddish is the vehicle of the historical experience of a thousand years of Jewish life.¹⁷

Today, more than ever, Judaism needs Yiddishism. Now, more than ever, the survival of the Jewish people requires openness and responsiveness to all Jewish generations and to the totality of our heritage. Once again the stone that the builders rejected must become the chief cornerstone. As Yehoshua Rapoport reminds us,

the life that took place in the Yiddish language has in large measure disappeared. But that life survives in the language itself. That is why Yiddish must now be cherished and protected even more than when it was alive. Yiddish must be preserved so that the cultural treasure which it possesses in the liveliest and most contemporaneous format does not disappear.¹⁸

Even the secularism or anti-clericalism of Yiddishism, despite its misreading of Jewish history, has a role to play in the present. It can serve to remind modern Jews who tend to see authentic Eastern European Jewry in one-dimensional religious terms, of the complexity of Eastern European Jewish society. Jewish pluralism was already in the making in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century when new forms of Judaism were aborning. *Teshuvah* or return to Judaism can legitimately take many forms.

Ever since the Emancipation and the Enlightenment, Yiddish language and literature helped sustain Jewish identity and helped bring new life and new hope to our people. Now, Yiddish and Yiddish literature must call upon all organs of Judaism and the Jewish people to rally to *their* aid and help sustain the culture that gave life to generations of the dry bones of our people the world over. As Leyzer Domankevitch has argued, when Judaism needed Yiddish—Yiddish was there. Now, when Yiddish needs Jewry and Judaism—they must be there for it.¹⁹ The task of Yiddishism today must be to get all sections and branches of our people to help support and sustain Yiddish language and culture. Yiddish linguistic and cultural content must become part of the educational programs of all Jewish schools, organizations and social agencies. Yiddishism must no longer content itself with being a trend. It must become part of the Jewish consciousness of every Jew.

The goal of a revitalized Yiddishism can be nothing less than the fulfillment of the Prophet's words:

"Your sons shall build once more the ancient ruins, and old foundations you shall raise again. You shall be called the repairer of ruins, the restorer of wrecked homes."²⁰

17. Hyman Bass, *Shrayber un Verk* (Tel Aviv, 1971), pp. 558–59.

18. Yehoshua Rapoport, *Zoymen in Vint* (Buenos Aires, 1961), p. 272.

19. Cf. Leyzer Domankevitch, *Verter un Vertn* (Tel Aviv, 1965), p. 20.

20. *Isaiah* 58:12 (Moffatt translation).

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